

2

I Got a
CHEAT SKILL
in **ANOTHER**
WORLD and Became
UNRIVALED
in the **REAL**
WORLD, Too

Miku

Illustration by
Rein
Kuwashima





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“I just...can't stop
thinking about him...”

Character:

Luna

A girl who trains against
monsters in the Weald.
After she meets Yuuya,
the two decide to train
together, but could she be
hiding something from him..?

I imagine a floating, basketball-sized sphere of water in my palm.
The book says that I should think of a name for the spell. How about Water Ball? It's a simple name, but it helps me link the spell name to the image I have in my mind.
After I have a concrete mental image, I try activating the spell.

“...Let's see if this works...
Water Ball!”

*Inheritor of the Sage's
Mightiest Spells*

Character:

Yuuya Tenjou

A young man who has reached his physical peak by leveling up in another world. After discovering the sage's book in a cave in the world, he inherits all the sage's magical abilities.

"Your girls are lethal."

"Does Yuuya...prefer girls with bigger chests...?"

"...How come she gets to have such big boobs?"

"H-hold on a sec!"

Character:

Kaori Houjou

The daughter of the principal of Japan's prestigious Ousei Academy, and a student there. She was helped by Yuuya when she was being harassed by delinquents.

Character:

Rin Kanzaki

Yuuya's classmate. She may have a blunt personality, but she also has a softhearted side.

Character:

Yukine Hyoudou

Yuuya's classmate. She sits next to Yuuya at school. She's quiet and coolheaded, with a good heart.

Character:

Kaede Kazama

Yuuya's classmate. A member of the track team. She's cheerful, friendly, and the life and soul of the party.

Secret Flower Garden

Armored Helm of the Lord of the Bloodstained Ogres

A drop item from a bloody Ogre Lord. This helm fully covers the face and allows its wearer to select a target to intimidate.

Worldsmasher

A mighty hammer. The weapon itself weighs the same as an adult man, but the enemy it strikes is hit with the mass of a planet.

"Now I have even more items..."

"All of these weapons are powerful enough to be national treasures..."

Divine Whip

The number of ends increases with the number of times cracked. This whip attacks with a mind of its own, and tears any target it wraps around to pieces.

Character:

Night

A black Fenrir puppy that joins forces with Yuuya after being saved from an attack by a King Orc in the Weald.

Character:

Lexia von Arsclia

First princess of the Araelian kingdom. She has a bold personality and suddenly proposes to Yuuya after he saves her life in the Weald.

Greatsword and Armor of the Pig King

Drops items from a King Orc. Both are extremely heavy, but a leveled-up Yuuya can use them both, no sweat at all.

"Snore..."



“They do say that love is
somewhat of a winding road!”



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New York

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ISEKAI DE CHEAT SKILL WO TE NI SHITA ORE WA, GENJITSU SEKAI WOMO MUSO
SURU Vol.2 ~LEVEL UP WA JINSEI WO KAETA~

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Prologue

I—Yuuya Tenjou—suffered a life of bullying until, one day, I came across a mysterious door.

Beyond that door lay another world, a dangerous one teeming with monsters unlike anything I'd ever seen on Earth. In that strange place, I found myself the inheritor of not only a house with impregnable defenses, but all manner of overpowered weapons and objects left behind by a man that I only knew as “sage.”

Somehow, I've managed to forge an existence in this new world by drawing on the powerful skills and titles I acquired upon my arrival, plus the items bestowed upon me.

I've also spent time fighting monsters and leveling up, which has allowed me to create a brand-new life completely different from the one I had before.

Back in the real world—on Earth—I've begun to thrive. I've even made new friends! And in the other...

After realizing the sort of fulfilling life that I could never have imagined in my wildest dreams, I finally encountered someone in the other world for the first time. Since I got here, all I've been doing is battling monsters, so actually meeting another person in this world was somewhat of a novelty for me.

I mean, I knew about the sage, so it wasn't like I thought I was all alone in this new place, but still...

It was an eventful first encounter. One that concluded with my rescue of a finely dressed damsel in distress from the creature that was about to attack her. In the end, she got away, and I was left believing that unless I ever dared to venture out of the forest, I would probably never see her again.

Little did I know that before long, we would be reunited under the very same circumstances...

“—Please marry me!”

“...Excuse me?”

I’m trying to make sense of what the girl in the beautiful dress just requested of me.

...Does this girl have any idea what she’s proposing?

As I stand there confused but sure that I must have heard wrong, a middle-aged knight approaches the girl with an alarmed expression on his face.

“Y-Your Highness?! What is the meaning of this?!”

“Isn’t it obvious...? I’m asking for his hand in marriage.”

“Yes, I can see that! What I am asking you is *why*?! Have you no idea how to act like a princess? We don’t even know the first thing about this fellow...”

“It’s called love at first sight! Do you intend to object?!”

“*You’re* upset with *me*?!”

...Uhhh, what exactly am I looking at here?

While I’m taken aback by the comedic duo doing a set in front of me, my gaze wanders over to the other soldiers, only to find them shrugging as if they’re thinking, *Here we go again*. Huh? Is this an everyday occurrence? That can’t be easy to deal with...

I’m still lost in my thoughts when the knight catches me staring blankly at him and the girl, so he quickly clears his throat.

“Ahem! Pardon me. How unbecoming of us. If it pleases you, I would like to introduce ourselves properly and talk more at length somewhere a smidge quieter...”

“My name is Lexia von Arselia! Wh-what’s yours?”

“Your Highness! Did you not hear what I just said about going somewhere quieter?”

“I did. What of it?”

“Why must you be so unruly...?”

The middle-aged knight puts a hand to his forehead and throws his head back in frustration.

“Um... My house is nearby. How about we go there...?” I offer, hoping to throw a bone to the knight but also because it’s the only quiet place around here that I can think of.

...I know it’s a gamble to invite someone to my house when I still haven’t figured out if they’re friend or foe, but it looks like they’ve already been through the ringer with the Goblin Elites. Besides, if they do try to use force, I’m sure I’ll be able to deal with it somehow.

And if escape back to my world does become necessary, I don’t think they’ll be able to pass through the door after me anyway.

...Still, these people don’t strike me as bad guys. Whether I should really trust my gut feeling is another matter entirely, though.

After hearing my suggestion, the soldiers seem more agitated than I

anticipated.

“Y-your house? Out here in the Weald?!”

“So it’s true... Someone *does* live out here...”

“Who is he...?”

The middle-aged knight looks just as surprised as the rest of the soldiers, but he soon nods in agreement.

“I would appreciate that, thank you.”

“Oh, my gosh!! A guy is inviting me over to his place!! I—I need some time to prepare myself...”

“Your Highness. Please give it a rest now...”

The middle-aged man sighs exhaustedly.

“So there really is a house out here...”

“...This place feels so different from the rest of the forest. Like stepping out from the cold into a patch of pleasant sunlight, wouldn’t you say?”

“I wonder why a place as warm and inviting as this exists in somewhere like the Weald...?”

As I show them all into my house—or rather the safe area that surrounds my house—the soldiers scan their surroundings, totally stunned.

I’d love to be able to show them all into the house itself, but just as I suspected, there’s not nearly enough room for everyone. I bring the middle-aged knight and the girl inside and leave the other soldiers in the garden to wait.

We each take a seat. There’s a momentary pause in which we gather ourselves and take a breath. Then the middle-aged knight begins to speak.

“Please allow me to introduce myself properly. My name is Owen. I’m a knight sworn to serve Princess Lexia of the Kingdom of Arselia. I must thank you for saving Her Highness...and the rest of us as well.”

“Oh! There’s no need to bow your head like that! I just happened to be in the right place at the right time!” I reply, flustered.

But the middle-aged knight—Owen—still doesn’t raise his head.

“...I insist. Even if it was simply a coincidence, we are in the Weald. It’s nothing short of a miracle that we’re still alive after stepping foot into this blasted forest. Please accept my deepest gratitude.”

“O-okay...”

I—I don’t know what else to say...

What I’ve noticed, however, is that based on Owen’s brief comments about the forest, it seems like even the people of this world are wary of this place...

As I start to tense up at the implications, the girl steps in to introduce herself.

"I am Lexia von Arselia, first princess of the Kingdom of Arselia. Please accept my humble gratitude for saving my life!"

"N-no worries. I'm just glad you're okay... Wait! Did you just say 'princess'?!"

My mind goes blank.

...Maybe I should have been paying more attention, because now that I think about it, I'm pretty sure Owen did call that girl—Lexia—something that sounded like "princess" when they were speaking earlier.

.....

"...Um, Owen?"

"What is it?"

"Uh...is Lexia...really a princess...?"

"She is. And she's not just any princess—she's the first princess."

"...And here I've been treating you like any other girl... You're not offended, are you?" I ask as soon as I regain my composure. Owen shakes his head with a smile.

"There's no need to worry. This is unofficial business. In any case, you're the hero who saved her life."

"Sigh... I had thought myself quite famous, mind you... I can't believe you didn't know who I am..."

"Oh, yeah... I'm sorry."

I automatically apologize.

Hopefully she forgives me. I don't understand how things work in this world...although maybe I can't go on using that as an excuse.

"S-so should I call you Princess Lexia from now on?"

"It's Lexia! Please feel free to drop the title!"

I only ask because I have no idea how I should address her, but man, do her moods swing wildly. Only a few seconds ago, she sounded pretty dejected, but she's already perked right up.

More importantly, are you even allowed to address a princess without her title? It's generally frowned upon, isn't it?

After I voice my concerns, Owen also attempts to appeal to Lexia somewhat, but in the end...well, we decide that I will only call her Princess Lexia in public and Lexia in private.

Is she sure about this, though? I have to say that as an ordinary person, it makes me a little nervous...

Now that Owen and Lexia have introduced themselves, it's about time I do the same.

"So... My name is Yuuya Tenjou. And I live in this, uh, forest?"

There's not much else to say...or rather, what else could I say? I can't exactly tell them I'm from another world...

Lexia and Owen begin whispering among themselves.

"Yuuya Tenjou... Can't say I've ever heard a name like that before

in Arselia..."

"Yet he does have what seems to be a family name in addition to a given one... Perhaps he does belong to a foreign royal family or noble house, as I posited before?"

"We...don't really have enough information to say one way or the other. At any rate, given that he's living out here in the Weald like this, I'm not sure that convention even really applies to him..."

"E-excuse me..."

"My apologies... So should we call you Sir Tenjou, then?"

"Huh? Oh...no. Tenjou is my surname. You can just call me by my first name: Yuuya."

"Hmph...even your name sounds different from the usual fare around here... Well then, Sir Yuuya, know that the reason we have journeyed all the way here to the Weald is because we have been in search of you."

"Huh? You were looking for me?"

The Weald. I need no explanation to deduce that they're talking about the area around here. The name even sounds foreboding. And if there's one word to describe this forest, it's *foreboding*...

But then why would they come to such a dangerous place just to look for someone like me?

Lexia's eyes light up as she leans toward me.

"That's right! I desperately wanted us to meet again, Sir Yuuya, so I came looking for you!"

"Wh-what? And by the way, I'm not much of a 'Sir Yuuya' kind of guy. If you could just call me Yuuya..."

"Overruled!"

"Now you're just being unreasonable..."

Why does an actual princess insist on calling me Sir? Isn't it kinda weird?

"When you say that you came to find me, er...Princess, do you mean that you came here for the same reason as Owen?"

"Yes! I wanted to convey my gratitude to you in person!"

Wow... I'd never have imagined in a million years that a member of a royal family would take the time to seek me out just to thank me. I still can't believe it. Lexia is so kind to remember what happened with the Goblin General and come all the way back here just to tell me that...

"In short, marry me!"

"Where is the 'thank you' in that?!"

She has Owen shouting again. What am I doing that's causing that word to be bandied about so much? Is proposing marriage a form of showing gratitude here? Surely that can't be right?

"But...we've only just met...and why would you want to marry

someone like me anyway?"

"Why'...? Because when that Goblin General was attacking me, you're the knight in shining armor who came to my rescue! I fell in love with you the moment I first laid eyes on you!"

"I understand that this man came dashing in to save you when you were in trouble, but...aren't you getting carried away? Why don't you take some more time to think about what you're saying? You're the princess of a kingdom, Your Highness."

"What's the problem? People fall in love at first sight all the time! It's in all the books!"

"Sigh... Perhaps I shouldn't have allowed you to read so many books like that."

I don't understand much of what's going on, but Owen sure seems to have his work cut out for him.

"Look...I'm sorry. I'm...I'm happy you feel that way about me, Lexia, but it's much too sudden for me..."

This seems uncannily like the Suspension Bridge Effect... I mean, she *was* just attacked by a band of Goblin Elites again. It's entirely possible that the adrenaline is affecting her ability to make any rational decisions right now... I know I'm inexperienced when it comes to love, but this feels like something that should be considered with cooler heads. Besides, Lexia is a princess. What would she want with someone like me? It's a total mismatch. I'm nothing special.

After I apologize to the princess and politely decline her proposal, Owen seems indifferent, but Lexia continues to look at me with stars in her eyes.

"I understand... They do say that love is somewhat of a winding road! But that's what makes it burn all the brighter! Every love story has its mountains to overcome!"

"Hmm?"

"Oh, um, never mind! Wh-why don't we start out as friends, then?"

"As friends?"

That...should be okay, right?

My heart skips a beat to hear her call us friends. Up until recently, no one wanted to be my friend... To hear someone present me with the option outright is a first.

Still...Lexia is a princess. Is she even able to just up and decide this?

Before I have the chance to vocalize my concerns, Owen picks up on my unease and offers a response.

"I don't foresee an issue if you are friends with Lord Yuuya, Princess... He does seem to be of a similar status, and more importantly, he lives in the depths of the Weald. I don't think we need to worry about anyone finding out about this..."

Owen finishes the latter part in a low voice, so it's difficult to make

out. I wonder what he means when he says it wouldn't be an issue if it's *me*, though.

In any case, does this mean I have tentative permission to be her friend?

I glance over at Lexia, who is staring back at me with eyes bright and expectant. Oof... If she looks at me like that...

"...Um, I hope we can be good friends."

"Yes! Me too!" Lexia exclaims, taking my hand in hers with a big smile on her face. She looks so overjoyed to befriend me of all people... Seeing that makes me feel ecstatic as well.

"Now that we've been able to properly express our gratitude... there's something else I would like to discuss with you, Lord Yuuya."

"There is?"

Owen stands at attention, so I also sit up straight.

"Yes. His Majesty heard how you bravely rescued Princess Lexia and insists that you present yourself at the royal palace so that he may also personally give you his gratitude."

"Th-the royal palace?!"

...As in the palace where the king lives?

"Wait, wait, wait, wait! Hold on a second! This is all so sudden...!"

"My apologies... I know it is a lot to ask, but His Majesty is desperate to meet you in person. You must understand how important Princess Lexia is to him."



“B-but...”

“Moreover, it would cause all manner of problems for the royal family not to honor the man who saved the life of one of their own. It won’t take long for the more skilled spies from other kingdoms to uncover the fact that Princess Lexia was attacked out here or that there is someone out here who saved her life. If we don’t act quickly, they may attempt to utilize such a misstep to their advantage somehow.”

“Oh...”

Kingdoms, huh...? When they bring up the culture here, I run out of things to say. After all, I’m just some outsider who was lucky enough to stumble into this land. Obviously, I need to follow the rules and customs here, though.

“Hmm...are you sure there won’t be any problems if I go to the royal palace? I have no idea what kind of etiquette is appropriate in a place like that...”

“You’ll be fine! Even I make mistakes sometimes!”

“Please don’t brag about that, Your Highness. In your case, Lord Yuuya, I don’t think there are any particular rules you will need to observe, but...”

Really? How can that be? We’re talking about the king here. I’m barely able to speak to my elders properly. How the hell am I going to know how to behave in front of the ruler of an entire kingdom?!

...That said, from the sound of it, I don’t have a choice.

“One question. How far is it from here to the royal palace? Do you expect the journey to take very long?”

“It’s not very far. It takes a day to get there, another day to get back.”

“I see...”

So the round trip will take two days. Add onto that another day to actually speak with the king, that’s three. Then another day or two in case something unexpected happens...and that’s four or five days at least...

And I still have to go to school. It looks like the only way I’ll be able to make it is if I go during the next long break. That’ll be Golden Week in late spring.

“I’m sorry about this, but would it be possible to postpone my visit for a month?”

“A month? Meaning thirty days?”

Oh, right! I need to be more careful! Even if time seems to flow here exactly as it does on Earth, the concept of a month might not necessarily exist! I was lucky this time...but now that I’m going to be paying a visit to the royal palace and spending a lot more time here in general, I need to be more mindful of things like that. It’s a good thing

that the thirty days Owen inferred still line up with my schedule.

Owen seems to be weighing things in his head after I make my request, and he eventually nods.

“We *are* asking a lot of you, after all. We can keep the king waiting for a month. You’ll be fine to make the journey after that, though, I presume?”

“Yes. In that case, it should be okay for me to leave here for a little while.”

“Hooray! This is the greatest achievement of your career so far, Owen!”

“You do me a disservice, Your Highness...”

Owen sighs wearily.

Then he begins to look around the room. When he speaks, he sounds impressed.

“I have to say, however...this house is incredible. Even though it’s in the middle of the Weald, I don’t sense any monsters coming to attack us at all... And while it is but a simple-looking dwelling, the house and everything inside it seems to be made from very high-quality materials... How in the world did you manage all this...?”

“Ah-ha-ha-ha...that’s sort of...a secret...”

All I’m doing is reaping the benefits of the sage’s hard work. I can’t explain why monsters don’t attack here because I just don’t know! If I had to guess, all I could offer is that it’s because the sage was so amazing. Yep.

“I’m sorry, I shouldn’t pry so much. The fruits of a wizard’s experiments are his and his to know alone... I don’t expect you to share them so easily. That said, if I were to find out how you’re able to remain so safe in an area as dangerous as the Weald, I’m sure it would fly in the face of all reason...”

I’m sure it would, too. Who the heck was this sage? No ordinary man would have been able to do what he did, right?

“Now that I think about it, there’s something I would like to ask you, too.”

“Go on.”

“Just how dangerous...is this forest?”

““Huh?!””

Owen and Lexia are both taken aback by my question.

“W-wait just one moment! Are you telling me that you settled here without knowing what kind of place this is?!”

“N-not exactly...”

I always thought everything that lay beyond the door to another world was just the sage’s house. I had no idea it was part of this “Weald” that I’m suddenly hearing so much about. I’m not sure they’re going to believe me about that, though...

“Uhhh...Lord Yuuya. Are you serious?”

“I am.”

I nod with a sincere look on my face, and Owen sighs again.

“...To think that anyone would reside here not knowing anything about this place...”

Owen straightens his posture, looks me in the eye, and states very matter-of-factly:

“This area is called the Weald. Of all the areas designated as danger zones in each kingdom, this forest is said to be among the deadliest.”

“Seriously?!”

A-are you for real?!

“And the reason why it is so dangerous...is very simple. The farther you venture into the forest, the number of freakishly strong monsters increases alarmingly. Beasts so powerful that they could devastate entire cities and kingdoms if they were ever so inclined. And each of these monsters is locked in a battle of survival against all the others, making them very territorial. Of course, this isn't at all to say it's any safer nearer the outskirts. That's certainly not the case. There are plenty of monsters capable of annihilating a good-sized city in the right numbers marauding around the edge of the woods, too. You remember the Goblin Elites from earlier, don't you? The entire forest is like a living nightmare.”

“.....”

I—I had no idea this was such an unforgiving place...

While Owen had been holding his own against a Goblin Elite in single combat when I found them in the forest, the other soldiers were obviously in over their heads and having trouble collectively taking on just one. If the battle had continued, the soldiers would have been defeated, and Owen would probably be dead by now, too.

“Up until now, we've been speaking of the Weald rather trivially, but allow me to briefly sum it up for you: It's survival of the fittest in its fiercest form.”

“Great...”

“What's more, you can't even pick any special herbs here. It's too dangerous... Not that anyone has ever made it far enough into the forest to find any. That said, who in their right mind would even dare? Their life would be forfeit the moment they stepped foot in here.”

It's almost as if Owen is purposely talking about the forest like he's trying to scare me away from it. I have no words.

That sage... What kind of place did he make himself at home in...?

The muscles in my face start to tense, but then Lexia murmurs something as she looks around the room.

“Now that you mention it, mustn't we traverse back through the

Weald to go home? That's going to be trouble..."

"Ack!"

Having obviously forgotten that they'd need to go back out there, Owen's face blanches.

"Y-you're right...! We risked our lives just to get here, and now...we have to go through all that again?! If we're attacked by another swarm of Goblin Elites...or even worse, a Goblin General, then—!"

I can sympathize with why Owen has gone so pale. It must make him feel sick just thinking about having to go back in there after everything he's said.

Isn't there any magic that can simply teleport them back to where they came from? I know magic exists here. I saw soldiers healing Lexia's injuries with it. Not to mention what I saw during my fight with the Devil Bear.

"Um, if you can lead us back out of the forest, shall I escort you?"

"“Huh?!””

Both Owen's and Lexia's attention shifts back to me.

"I know that it's a dangerous place, but I'm used to being out there, so I can accompany you...er, Your Highness..."

"You needn't speak so politely, Lord Yuuya. It is only we three here. But are you sure you would like to escort us? It doesn't matter how long you have lived here, traveling through the Weald just to see us on our way would be—"

"It's fine. That said, the later it gets, the stronger the monsters we'll encounter along the way, so if you plan to leave, we'd better hurry."

I still don't have a lot of experience to go on, but on occasion, I have explored these parts at night and have sometimes encountered individual monsters that are curiously stronger than their daytime counterparts. That's why I prefer to explore the forest in daylight. It's much safer. There's better visibility, too.

Now that I know more about this forest, I'm sure I wouldn't like to find out just how strong some of the monsters that come out at night might be. Owen said some are powerful enough to destroy entire kingdoms. I don't even want to think about it...

Owen snaps me out of my daze of hellish imaginings with a nod.

"I—I understand. In that case, we shall prepare to move out posthaste."

"Looks like I get to stay with Sir Yuuya a little longer! How about you and I use this time to get to know each other better?"

"Your Highness. You are a *princess*. You must show a little more decorum..."

"Please just do away with that stuff already!"

"Let's try apologizing as behooves someone of your stature."

Lexia...I don't think continually refusing to act very ladylike is

doing Owen's blood pressure any favors... Maybe you should give him a break...

And with that, it's time to lead Owen and the others back through the forest.

"Is...this it?"

"Y-yeah... Seems like it..."

After following Owen out of the forest, I've arrived at the entrance together with Lexia and the other soldiers.

Although one of the reasons I decided to accompany them back here was so that I could protect the party from monsters, another reason was that it'll be safer for all of us if I can remember the way out when I journey to the royal palace next month. They entered the forest and put themselves in harm's way in order to find me, so if I memorize the route now, next time, they just have to meet me here instead of putting their lives at risk.

"Phew, it's a good thing we didn't run into any strong monsters back there."

"“Huh?!”"

It seems that luck was on our side. The strongest monster we encountered when leaving the forest was a Devil Bear. Other than that, we were only set upon by the usual bands of Bloody Ogres and Goblin Elites, plus a Hell Slime, so we didn't have to fight anything I'd never come across.

"T-tell me if I'm imagining things, but did I just hear him say that we didn't run into any 'strong' monsters on the way out?"

"Y-you must be. We got attacked by a Devil Bear! I've heard of those things ripping entire armies to pieces! And a Hell Slime! People who encounter those don't usually live to tell the tale."

"Yet here we are...still alive...living to tell the tale?"

"“...I just don't understand it...”"

"Way to go, Sir Yuuya...! I knew you were the one best fit to be my prince...!"

...? It feels like people are looking at me with all kinds of mixed feelings... I haven't done anything wrong, have I?

I start getting worried, but then Owen suddenly comes out of his daydream.

"Ah-hmm...?! Oh, please excuse me. It's been a long day. I was lost in thought..."

"Yes you were. Are you all right?"

"I-I'm fine. It's just a personal matter....." Then he mumbles to himself, "Doesn't Lord Yuuya upset the entire balance of this world by himself? Hmm.....mayhap it would be for the best to have Princess Lexia actually make an effort here...?"

“...?”

Just when I thought he'd come to his senses, he's already drifting back into his own little world again...

“Sir Yuuya!”

“Yes? Argh—!”

Turning toward Lexia's voice...I suddenly find her arms wrapped around me!

“Sir Yuuya, to think this is goodbye... I miss you so much already...”

“Oh! Yeah, uh...um...I understand that you'll miss me, but what's going on here?”

With her hugging me, it's like I can feel every inch of her body...!

Maybe it's because I don't have the capacity in my head to process this occurrence, but I've lost the ability to even speak in coherent sentences. I just can't comprehend what is happening at all!

“Sir Yuuya...I know you rejected my marriage proposal, but I won't give up! You've captured my heart with your bravery and the kindness you have shown to myself and my soldiers on our journey!”

“Erm?!”

“So when we meet again next month...I shall show you how I plan to steal your heart—and believe me, I will succeed!”

Lexia changes her tone, pulls away from me, and points her finger directly at me.

“So you'd better be prepared!”

All I can do is nod.

CHAPTER 1

Night

“Whew...”

It’s been a whole day since I met Lexia and the others for the first time.

I’m still struggling to come to terms with all my feelings, so I’ve decided to take a little wander around this world to try and clear my head.

...I can’t believe someone who can proclaim their love so shamelessly exists...

Having mostly been targeted and tormented growing up, it has been a huge shock to my system to receive a marriage proposal from a princess... I’m so confused.

Why me...? She says it was love at first sight for her, but really, I just so happened to be nearby and able to save her life...

Well, it doesn’t matter how much I think about it; it’s not like I’m going to understand her feelings any better. Right now, I’ve come out here to explore and get my mind off things, so that’s what I’m gonna do. Once I get into a battle, I won’t have time to dwell on what happened anymore.

I shake my head to try and dislodge some of those intrusive thoughts and then resume my exploration, but there are no monsters to be found.

“Hmm...I assumed I would run into more monsters the farther into the forest I went, but...”

I feel like my decisions—or maybe even my entire mentality—are much bolder these days.

The old me would have probably fainted at the sight of a monster. Then at least I wouldn’t have to acknowledge the creature, never mind fight one. But now here I am, actively seeking them out as a means to make myself feel better. This is becoming a disturbing tendency. I need to watch it.

“Argh, it’s no good... Guess I’ll leave it here for today and pick the hunt back up tomorrow.”

I’ve actually made it pretty far into the forest, but since I can’t use magic, I’ll have to make the journey all the way back here on foot tomorrow to pick up where I left off.

I know I shouldn’t think of it as a complete waste of time, but it feels extremely inefficient. At least I seem to be able to make the door to this world materialize wherever I need it to. That makes getting home to my world quick, but...

“I’ve walked a fair distance today; there’s a good chance I’ll stumble upon something I missed on the way back.”

I already factored in the time I thought it would take to get back to the house on foot when I decided to call it a day, so there shouldn’t be any major problems going back the same way.

Once I make up my mind, I immediately turn back the way I came.

I bet if I could use magic, I could come and go with a snap of my fingers.

As I wistfully dream of what could be if I only knew magic, my ears catch a small sound.

Something whimpers, followed by a shriek.

Neither of those sounds are very humanlike...

What could it possibly be? I activate my One with Nature skill and hold my breath as I edge closer to the source of the noises.

And there...

“Graaaaauh!!”

“Arf!”

...an enormous monster with a manlike body and the face of a pig is attacking a lone black dog.

The pigman’s sword doesn’t look as good as mine, but it’s by no means shabby. In contrast, the black dog is tiny, like a puppy no more than a few weeks old.

The pup is bloody and bruised but doing its best to stay standing. Some kind of black vapor rises from its body but disappears instantly when the puppy staggers and falls to the ground.

The pig monster’s face contorts into a smirk so evil that even from this distance, I can feel its malice... It’s strange. Whichever way I look at the situation playing out in front of me, the pigman is the bad guy. Even though this is nothing more than the law of the jungle.

That’s right, the pigman doesn’t bear a grudge. Living creatures fighting over territory is just natural.

Yet my eyes are telling me the pig monster *is* the evil one. Perhaps it’s just me projecting my own experiences onto the situation, but the pigman looks like it’s tormenting the pup on purpose. But this is nature. It’s just the way things are. We humans do this to one another

all the time.

Still, since I've found a creature I've never encountered before, I use my Appraise skill to take a look at its stats.

King Orc

Level: 600, **Mana:** 5000, **Attack:** 20000, **Defense:** 15000,
Agility: 5000, **Intelligence:** 5000, **Luck:** 1000

Whoa, what's with this monster?

It has 20,000 in attack... Are you shitting me? Its defense is really high, too. I've yet to break 10,000 in any of my stats... Besides that, its level isn't only higher than mine, it totally eclipses both the Devil Bear and the Goblin General!

Don't tell me... Could this be an S-class monster?

That said, if there are monsters that have the potential to be S-class because of their species or rank but still hover at a low level, then the reverse is probably also true. Even if this King Orc is an absolute force to be reckoned with, that doesn't automatically mean it's an S-class.

The pigman is decked out in the finest armor...and if it's called a King Orc, then I bet there are more orcs or something lurking nearby. Just like when I encountered the goblins.

Man, I used to look just like that pigman before I lost weight, but now...I'm a small fry! In a battle of pork, the old me would have blown this thing out of the water! It's not fair!

...Putting that aside, this King Orc would obviously be too much for me to handle. He could easily one-shot me.

When I fought the Devil Bear, I always felt like I had a chance, but this guy's level and stats are way too high! I'd need to level up more just to put up a fight.

...Sorry, pup, but it's probably for the best if I just move on and forget I saw anything.

I guiltily attempt to sneak away...

"Graaaaagh!"

"Arf!"

"....."

As soon as I hear the puppy's heartbreaking whine, I stop in my tracks.

...Sigh. I really am beyond help, aren't I?

I wonder what Gramps would do in this situation... There's no way he'd just leave the puppy to fend for itself. But in my case, it would be totally reckless and, in the end, pretty much all just for show.

Yet my heart is still telling me that I want to save this pup. I guess I don't have a choice.

I decide to give up on running away and fix my stare back on the

King Orc. Luckily for me, it doesn't seem like it has sensed that I'm here.

...First things first, maybe I should try drawing its attention with a sneak attack.

It's a higher level than me, so it's more than likely that my strike will be repelled. But then its attention will be on me...and I'll just have to wing it. I can't help myself. I guess I do live in an escapist fantasy sometimes.

I grab my Absolute Spear from the Item Box and shift my body into a throwing stance right where I'm standing.

Then...

"Take...THAT!"

I throw the Absolute Spear toward the King Orc with all the might I can muster.

Without wasting a second, I reach for the Omnisword and jump out of my hiding place to attract the King Orc's attention.

"Hey! Come and get me!" I roar, brandishing the sword and ready for the King Orc to charge me at any time.

"....."

The King Orc's torso has been blown away.

"...Huh?"

When I take a closer look, something suspiciously spear-shaped seems to have torn a massive hole right through it.

...Hey... This can't be right...

As I arrive at a pretty unbelievable conclusion, the bloody Absolute Spear returns to my hand.

"....."

One look at the Absolute Spear removes all doubt.

Did I just...one-shot the King Orc?

The remaining lower half of the beast falls to its knees before collapsing in a heap on the ground and fading away into scattered motes of light.

"Whaaaa...?!"

No way! It really died!

Huh, then what about my little suicide charge back there? The way I lunged forward screaming...that's so embarrassing!

I had no idea I would be able to kill the King Orc in one hit. All I can do is stand there with a dumb look on my face.

...But when I stop and think about it, it's not so strange at all.

I beat the Bloody Ogre back when my level and stats were still at 1, and that was way more powerful than me.

I have a newfound appreciation for how overpowered the Absolute Spear is.

"Who the hell was that sage who used to live in my house and left

me all these weapons...?”

I'm becoming very curious about the man's identity. At this point, someone could tell me that the sage was a god, and I'd be inclined to believe them. Even though it seems like he lived and died like any other person...

“Whatever... I can think about that later...”

“Awoo...!”

I turn my attention to the puppy trying to scare me away between ragged panting breaths.

No surprises there... Animals have always hated me...

If I ever got close to a dog or a cat, they would bark and growl or try to bite or scratch me...

After going through all that, I became very wary of animals and, to be honest, a little bit afraid of them. That's not to say I hate them, though.

Although maybe they hated me after they got close enough to suffer my stench or catch a glimpse of my disgusting face. Not that I blame them. Even if admitting it makes me feel like crying.

I exhale a prolonged sigh and take an Herb of Complete Healing Juice from the Item Box.

“Um...here. I know you probably hate me, but look at all that vapor. You'll be right as rain once you get this down you...so...please drink it, for me?”

The puppy tries to intimidate me as I cautiously approach it at first, but before long, it crumples to the ground as if its little body has finally given up.

“Hey!”

I dash over to the puppy, pick it up, and pour the juice down its throat.

I hope the dog doesn't mind citrus flavor, but it will have to make do with what I've got.

As I finish administering the juice to the barely conscious pup, the vapor that was rising from its body vanishes.

As the puppy slowly wakes up, it stares at its body, mystified.

“Phew...looks like I was just in time.”

I sigh again, then I suddenly feel a lick on my hand.

“Hmm?”

“Woof!”

The puppy barks and begins to paw at my legs... It's so cute!

Unable to stop myself from beaming at the puppy, I ask it something that's been on my mind.

“What happened to your mommy? It's dangerous to be all alone out here.”

Maybe people would wonder what the hell I'm talking to a dog for,

but something makes me feel like it can understand what I'm saying.

The puppy lets out a whine and looks down sadly toward the ground.

"Are you lost, then...?"

"Awoo..."

The dog shakes its head.

"So...you don't have a mommy at all?"

"Woof..."

The dog nods mournfully.

Hmm...

"Then why don't you come and live with me?"

"Woof?"

"I have a place, and even if you don't like it, at least you'll have somewhere you can live."

That's right. If I have the puppy stay at my place in this world, then it doesn't even matter if I'm unable to keep it back home in my world.

"What do you want to do?"

Maybe it's because I saved its life, but I already feel so attached to it. It's just so unbelievably sweet.

The pup looks up at me with sparkling eyes and barks.

"Woof!"

Looks like it likes the idea.

At that moment, a message appears.

"Tame skill acquired. Successfully tamed Black Fenrir."

Huh? What's Tame?

I haven't used my Appraise skill on the dog yet...but I guess this species is called Black Fenrir, then. Hmm? I've got a feeling I've heard the name Fenrir somewhere before... Well, whatever.

"Woof."

"Heh, aren't you a cutie?"

I can't stop a lovestruck look from forming on my face as I check out the new skill I've acquired.

Tame—A skill to turn monsters into allies with a certain rate of success.

Ohhh, so there's a skill to befriend monsters...

I then Appraise the puppy.

Black Fenrir

Level: 500, **Mana:** 10000, **Attack:** 10000, **Defense:** 10000,

Agility: 15000, **Intelligence:** 10000, **Luck:** 10000

Note: Subordinate of Yuuya Tenjou

“Hey, you’re stronger than I thought!”

“Woof?”

The puppy tilts its head as though it has no idea what I’m talking about, but it’s even stronger than I am. And yet...it couldn’t take down the King Orc with stats like these? Maybe it was ambushed. Or maybe it was simply already in bad shape before the orc appeared. I mean, even I managed to kill the King Orc with a surprise attack despite the difference in our levels.

“So do I still get to boss you around even though you’re stronger than me?”

I’m not upset about it; I just wonder if it’s really okay. I’m nothing special, after all. I’m just a lowly peon.

The puppy doesn’t seem to care at all and just wags its tail happily.

“Woof! Woof!”

“Oh well. First things first. We have to give you a name...”

It would be weird to keep on referring to it as just *puppy*, and *Black Fenrir* is a bit of a mouthful.

As I stare at the pup, which is looking back at me very curiously, an idea pops into my head.

It hits me after I take in its silky jet-black fur.

That’s what I’ll name it.

“I know! I’ll call you Night.”

Night—for its black fur.

That was easy.

And the first part of *Yuuya* also means “night,” so it matches me, too...

The puppy—Night—looks pleased with his new name and wags his tail even harder.

“Woof!”

Night barks once and jumps into my arms.

“Whoa, steady...! Shall we go home, then?”

“Woof!”

After making sure Night is nice and snug, I throw the drop items from the King Orc into the Item Box without a second thought and head home. I can look at them when we get back.

—And that’s how I found my lovable friend, Night, and acquired myself a brand-new family.

Once I get back to my house in this world, I turn to Night.

“All right, so we’re going to be living together from now on...but right now, I need you to stay here.”

“Woof?”

Night cocks his head as if to ask *Why*?

“Erm, well...the thing is, I wanna take care of you properly. That

means taking you for walks and stuff and...to put it simply, my house on Earth isn't ready for you yet."

"Wooooof..."

Night whines dejectedly. Awww! How adorable!

"I'm sorry, Night. I'll be as quick as I can to make my house on Earth livable for you, too."

I still don't have a collar or a leash, and I'm a little worried about bringing Night back to Earth without them.

I don't think it'll be a huge problem to keep Night on Earth, since we can understand each other like this, but you can never be too careful. Whatever happens, Night is still a creature from another world.

"Well, if I'm going to make a home for you, then I guess the first stop will be the pet store..."



Even though online shopping is extremely convenient and exists in my world, I've been too chronically poor to ever buy a smartphone, never mind a computer, so I have zero experience with the internet.

Man, I don't even know where to find a pet store near where I live.

Like I said, I'm not online, so I can't just look up where they are, either... Maybe I can ask someone I know. I wonder if Ryou or one of the others can point me in the right direction.

Although getting Night set up back home is my top priority, I also want to buy a book to learn how to use the guitar that the Devil Bear dropped.

...Since I'm buying one and have more money to play with now... maybe I should get something brand-new. Yeah, I think that would be nice.

I haven't bought books new since I bought my school textbooks. That said, I only ever buy school textbooks...

"...What the—? Are these tears...?"

"Woof..."

Night places a paw on my knee and gives me a gentle lick. It feels like he's trying to comfort me. Night sure is therapeutic to have around.

"Night... Thank you. Now! Since we've got all the decisions about what to do next out of the way, shall we see what spoils we got today?"

"Woof!"

Since I dumped everything the King Orc dropped straight into the Item Box without looking at any of it, let's see what we got.

The first thing I take out is a delicious-looking piece of meat.

Meat of the Pig King—Meat from a King Orc. A very high-quality ingredient coveted by lords and ladies everywhere. As King Orcs are extraordinarily powerful and appear extremely rarely, their meat's very existence is said to be an old wives' tale. Provides unparalleled energy if eaten.

"Hey, wait a second."

This description contains a lot of alarming words.

First, it makes it sound like this meat is incredibly uncommon, further proof that this monster must have been insanely powerful. Yet I one-shotted it with the Absolute Spear. Even though the people here know these monsters to be total calamities. It's like I don't know my own strength...

Second, it says the meat provides "unparalleled energy" when eaten? But why energy and not stamina...? Unless energy is stamina...?

“Whatever. All that matters is that it tastes good. Apart from that...”

Next, I pull out the armor and sword that the King Orc had equipped.

Greatsword of the Pig King—A greatsword owned by a King Orc. The sword is so heavy that it cannot even be picked up by someone of average strength. This sword is not very sharp and relies on its weight and sturdiness to crush enemies instead.

Armor of the Pig King—Armor equipped by a King Orc. The armor is so heavy that it cannot even be picked up by someone of average strength. As it was made to be worn by King Orcs, it does not fit humans. It is very sturdy and cannot be damaged by normal weapons. It is recommended to melt the armor down and forge new weapons out of it.

“...Hmm, these sound pretty hard to use...”

And here I’m just throwing something like the Absolute Spear around...

But even stranger than that...

“...”

I’m easily holding up both the greatsword and the armor in each hand.

“Wha...?”

Since when did I have such monstrous strength? Didn’t it say that those of average strength aren’t able to pick these items up? Is there some kind of mistake?

...Hmm, maybe this is just normal in this world.

To be fair, sometimes I feel like the sage who used to own my overpowered weapons is like a supernatural presence within me. Maybe I’m not too far from the truth. At least, that’s what I would like to keep believing.

I check out the remaining item drops.

Magic Stone: S—Rank S. A special ore that can be obtained from monsters with mana.

Hairbrush of the Pig King—A rare drop item from a King Orc. A hairbrush that can brush any hair type without tugging; nourishes hair and gives it a lustrous shine. This hairbrush can also be used on sparse hair and bald heads, where it revitalizes dead hair follicles to grow hair back. It is very rarely available and is traded for enormous sums of money between nobles with hair concerns. New hairbrushes are only said to appear once every several thousand years.

“I—I don’t even know where to begin with these items!”

Starting with the stone, it’s S-rank, which means that King Orc must have been an S-class monster. But that makes the level system here so weird. If the level of an S-class monster like a King Orc is less than the level of an A-class monster, then that makes the A-class monster stronger, right? I mean, I encountered an S-class monster, and it didn’t turn out to be such a big deal. In any case, I guess I still don’t understand what I’m supposed to do with the Magic Stones, so I’m just going to sell this one like usual. I wonder how much it’s worth.

I leave the Magic Stone and get to the real enigma: the hairbrush.

What’s with this thing?

I’m sure any balding man would pay an arm and a leg for one of these, noble or not. They must go for some crazy price if only the aristocracy can afford them...

And now I’m suddenly being bestowed with daily commodities, huh? Even if its effect is pretty bizarre.

“Woof?”

Night sees me unconsciously making a face at the brush and tilts his head as if to ask *What’s up?* as he paws at my legs. It’s super cute.

“...Nah, it’s nothing... Although...! Night, can you come here for a second?”

“Woof!”

Having just been struck by an idea, I place Night in my lap.

Then I start brushing him with the Hairbrush of the Pig King.

Night is covered in fur rather than hair, but the hairbrush’s effect still activates as I run it through his coat. His fur becomes silky and beautiful, with a captivating texture that makes me keep stroking it. It’s, like, silky yet still fluffy... Argh! What am I even talking about...?

“Does that feel nice?”

“Woof.”

Night replies contentedly as if he’s completely relaxed.

Good, good. I’m grateful that I found the guitar and the necklace, but I’m also glad I found an item that can be used like this.

That said...why am I acquiring rare drop items so easily? They don’t seem very rare.

Not that it really matters to me. I’m not the kind of person to look a gift horse in the mouth.

The last thing I check is my stats.

I didn’t receive any particular message after I defeated the King Orc, but I won’t be surprised if my level has gone up. The orc was stronger than me, so...

I check my stats, only to find...

“Huh? It hasn’t gone up at all...”

Then I guess no message means no leveling up, either.

“That’s weird... I thought that because I defeated a stronger enemy, I’d...”

Hmm, if the concept of experience points exists here and levels are determined by the number of points I receive, then...maybe I just didn’t receive very many from that battle? I mean, all I did was throw a spear.

Yet I killed the Bloody Ogre and Hell Slime in pretty much the same way...

Then again...I defeated those monsters when I had hardly any experience points to begin with. Now I can battle monsters like the Goblin General without even breaking a sweat, so if I want to earn more experience in the future, maybe I have to put more effort in than just lobbing a spear...

“...Anyway, overthinking it probably isn’t going to solve anything. I’m sure I’ll understand leveling up better with time. Even if I didn’t level up this time, I’ll just have to do my best in the future.”

“Woof!” Night barks in reply.

In the morning, I prepare Night’s breakfast and lunch before heading out to school.

Usually, when I say “I’m leaving now” as I head out, all I’m met with is silence, but...

“All right, I’m leaving now.”

“Woof!”

...now I have Night.

I grin at Night’s send-off and leave the house.

As soon as I arrive at school, I’m greeted by Ryou and the others.

“Oh, Yuuya! Good morning!”

“G-good m-morning.”

“Mornin’, Yuuya!”

“Oh, morning, everyone.”

Once we’ve said our hellos, I sit at my desk and chat with them for a while until homeroom begins.

While we talk, I remember that I need to buy a collar for Night, so I ask Ryou and the others if they know where I can get one.

“Hey, do you know if there’s a pet store around here?”

“A pet store?”

“Yeah. I got a dog yesterday...”

“What?! You got a dog?! What kind? Do you have any pictures?!”

“C-calm down...”

Taking much more interest than I expected, Kaede leans forward into my personal space. She’s suddenly right up in my face. A flustered feeling threatens to overwhelm me to the point where I can’t bear to

even look directly at her.

“Hey...Kaede...you’re kinda close...”

“What?! Ah! I-I’m so sorry!”

Kaede notices my discomfort and pushes herself back in a panic, her cheeks tinged slightly pink. At least I’m not the only one who was embarrassed.

“It’s okay...! Anyway...where was I? Oh yeah...I would show you pictures if I could, but I can’t. I don’t own a smartphone...”

“...It’s crazy to me that you don’t have a smartphone in this day and age...”

“S-same here... Isn’t it i-inconvenient?”

Ryou and Shingo look surprised. They’re not wrong, though. Those of us without smartphones are a dying breed these days... But now that I have some money, maybe I can finally make my smartphone—no—cell phone debut!

I don’t have many people to call or text, so it really makes no difference to me, but I guess I *would* be able to take pictures of Night—wait, couldn’t I just buy a camera?

As I sit weighing the advantages of smartphone technology, Ryou and the others tell me about a nearby pet store.

“If you’re looking for a pet store around here...there should be one in the shopping district near the academy.”

“Oh, there?! If you go there, then you probably won’t have to worry about anything pet-related ever again. They operate as a vet as well, so if you have any problems with your dog, you can always pay them a visit!”

“Wow, I didn’t know places like that existed...”

I’m having trouble deciding whether it would be appropriate to bring a creature from the other world like Night to a vet in this one, but...if there is a place like that nearby, then it’s better to know in case anything happens. If Night gets sick, I could always use some Herb of Complete Healing, though. The other world sure is convenient like that.

“I wish I could go there with you, but...I’m kinda busy today.”

“Y-yeah, and I have things that I n-need to take care of, too...”

Neither Ryou nor Shingo can join us, it seems.

“Okay...that’s too bad, then, I guess.”

“Um...can I go with you instead?”

“Huh?”

“I don’t have any club activities, so...if it’s all right with you, then how about it?”

I listen to Kaede make her case and nod.

“You really don’t mind coming with me?” I ask.

“N-no way! I’m glad to help! ...Wait. Does that make it a date...?!

Awesome!”

“Wha—?”

“N-nothing...!”

Kaede nervously backtracks, so I pay her comment no mind.

In any case, the plan is set. Kaede is going to show me the way to the pet store after school.

“I’m home!”

“Woof!”

Night jumps up on my chest as soon as I get through the door as though he’s been waiting for me.

I quickly catch the pup in my arms and begin petting him.

“I know, I’m sorry I left you all alone today. You’re gonna have to get used to it, though, buddy...”

“Awoo...”

Night gently rubs his cheek against my chest. It’s so freaking adorable.

“...Oh yeah! Guess what, Night! I’ve got some presents for you!”

“Woof?”

The pet store my classmates told me about really was a one-stop shop, so I managed to find a collar and a leash and everything else I needed.

“You don’t have to wear this thing in the house, but I’ll need to put it on you when we go outside. You cool with that?”

“Woof!”

“...Good.”

Night barks happily and slips his own head through the collar.

I’ve been thinking this for a while, but Night is pretty dang smart. I wonder if he’s even more intelligent than I am.

In any case, I’ve bought Night a nice white collar in the hope that it pops against his black fur.

After slipping the collar over Night’s head, I’m relieved to see that it looks great on him.

“Great! ...How does it feel? Is it too tight?”

“Woof... Woof!”

Now that he has a collar and a leash, I think it might be time for our first walk.

The moment I suggest a stroll outside, Night replies with an enthusiastic bark. I can’t help but smile.

“Okay, then. Stay here for now while I get ready.”

“Woof!”

I put the food I bought from the pet store in the fridge and get ready to take Night on his first Earth outing.

I’m sure that a pup as smart as Night won’t walk around going potty

everywhere, but I still need to consider proper puppy care etiquette... so I grab a poop scoop, gloves, and some plastic baggies before I turn toward the front door.

“Okay, all set! Let’s go!”

“Woof!”

And with that, we rush out of the house.

“Woof! Woof!”

“Hey, Night! Don’t get too excited. It’s dangerous!”

I’ve been worrying that since this will be his first adventure outside in a city, Night might be afraid of all the cars and things, but my concern turns out to be completely unfounded.

Night’s eyes are wide and shining with curiosity at all the new sights. Luckily, he’s smart and doesn’t go blindly charging toward what he’s taken an interest in. He always looks to me to check first. It’s so cute. I know I can’t stop gushing about my gorgeous pup, but who could blame me? Night is just that lovable.

That said, I thought we were stepping out at a time when hardly anyone else would be around, but there are tons of people out jogging and walking their dogs like I am.

In hindsight, I used to be a bit of a shut-in once I got home from school, so I hadn’t known.

But a lot of those people sure seem to agree with me that Night is so cute, because none of them are able to peel their eyes away as we walk by. And why should they? Night is downright adorable.

People used to look at me with disdain whenever they saw me out and about, but...this is amazing.

As I walk quietly down the street with Night, everyone who passes by says hello.

“Good evening.”

“Huh?! G-good evening!”

No one has ever greeted me in public like this before. It’s really throwing me off.

To think that people are even acknowledging *me*... I guess that’s the might of Night’s cuteness.

After enjoying a nice, normal lap around the area, we return home. Once we get inside, I tell Night about an idea I’ve just had.

“Once you’ve had your dinner, shall we go for a walk in the other world, too?”

“Woof!”

Although I guess from Night’s perspective, this world is “the other world.” Not that it matters right now. I’ve been thinking that it might be helpful if I get rid of a few monsters near the entrance to the forest. It’ll make it a little easier for Owen and the others to come find me

there if they ever drop by again.

I know an outing in the forest is a little too dangerous to categorize as a walk, and even if I do cut down some monsters, it won't be so easy to lower their numbers overall. But if we keep it up, something might change, so I'd like to make it a habit. Plus, I'm way stronger than I was before.

The best part is that I can accumulate more battle experience.

I still don't really understand how dangerous this new world is, but it can't hurt to get stronger. It'll make the area around my home, and the time I spend there, a bit safer, too.

Now that I have a plan and Night is fed, it's time to set out on our "walk."

—After his first walk with Night, little did Yuuya know that he had been the target of many a stealthy video or photo and was now the subject of much online swooning.

"Wow, who is that guy?!"

"Hey, I recognize this place!"

"He's sooo hot...! And check out that dog! Isn't it the sweetest?"

"I wonder what breed it is. I can't tell at all..."

As he racked up hits online, Yuuya, owning neither a cell phone nor a social media account, remained oblivious. That is...until much, much later.

Several wonderful and fulfilling days have passed.

I've been spending the days at school shooting the breeze with Ryou and the others and then coming home to find Night waiting patiently for me later in the evening.

I never truly felt like I belonged either at home or at school...but all that has changed now.

"...It's thanks to you, little buddy."

"Woof?"

I feel so grateful for Night's presence as I pick him up in my arms and ruffle his fur. Night looks back at me with curiosity.

After that, I attach the leash to Night's collar, and we set out on our usual path for Night's walk.

Our route takes us past the riverbank to a nearby park where Night and I like to play together before heading home.

At first, Night would be overcome with wonder and get overexcited about all sorts of things, but now he just seems to enjoy the time he spends trotting leisurely alongside me.

I'm also starting to remember the faces of some of the people who stop to greet us on our walks, and more people are saying hello than ever.

...Mind you, I don't remember there being this many people on our route before. Lately, I get the feeling that way more people are out and about—especially girls. Maybe I'm just imagining things, though.

"Um? Yuuya?"

"Huh? Oh! Kaori!"

Halfway through our walk, we run into Kaori.

She's holding some bags, so I guess she's on her way home from shopping.

"Hello. Um...who's this fellow?"

"Oh, right, I'd better introduce you. This is Night. The new addition to my family."

"Woof!"

As I introduce Night to Kaori, Night enthusiastically barks and puffs out his chest.

My guess is that he's probably trying to look cool, but he's so small that all he can manage is to look cute.

"How sweet! C-can I pet him?"

"What do you say, Night?"

"Woof."

Night saunters over to Kaori, who slowly begins to pet him.

"Woow! Your fur is so soft and silky!"

"Woof..."

Night seems happy to hear Kaori's reaction and rubs up against her.

"This puppy is such a cutie! What breed is he?"

"Er...I...well...I don't actually know. He's a rescue."

"He is? But just look at that face. Someone certainly looks glad to have found a new home."

"Woof!"

Night barks once as if agreeing with Kaori. Oof... I'm so happy to hear that, Night...

Still, what a close call! If anyone asks what kind of dog Night is, I don't have an answer for them... I think he was called a Black Fenrir or something in the other world...

"You're very intelligent, aren't you, Night?"

"Woof?"

I can't say for sure, but I think she's right. Night's a very capable young pup.

As Kaori continues to play with Night, I slowly realize that people are looking our way.

"Hey, isn't that...?!"

"I can't get enough of the hot guy-cute pup combo as it is, but add *her* into the mix and..."

"Look at that puppy and that girl...they're just too cute together! My eyes can't take it."

“Hey...Kaori, I think people are staring at us. Would you like to go someplace else?”

“What? Oh, of course.”

But the moment we make to leave, I hear someone say my name.

“—Yuuya?”

“Huh?”

Surprised, I turn toward the source of the voice, and...standing there frozen in surprise is Miu, the model.

“M-Miu? What are you doing here?!”

“I um...I happen to live around here. I’m just out for my usual stroll...”

“Yuuya, who’s this...?”

I suddenly remember that this is the first time Kaori and Miu have met, so I introduce them to each other.

“Let’s see here. Kaori, this is Miu. I met her when we did a photo shoot together in the mall. And Miu, this is Kaori, my friend from school, and Night, my dog.”

“N-nice to meet you...”

“Woof!”

Kaori greets Miu with a little shyness in her voice while Night greets her with his usual friendly bark.

“Kaori and Night...right? I’m Miu. I’m a model.”

The murmurs from those around us go up a level in volume as Miu greets us with a smile.



“H-hold up...is this a hot person convention or something?!”

“Isn’t that the model Miu?”

“Huh? No way! Seriously...?!”

Now that Miu is here, all the people who have noticed her are starting to gather, too.

When she realizes this, she flashes us a wry smile.

“Ah-ha-ha, looks like I drew too much attention... Do you always walk your dog around here, Yuuya?”

“Hmm? Oh, yeah. At least for now.”

I originally thought I might try and find a different route, but after seeing Miu, I think I’ll stick to this one a little longer.

Miu smiles softly.

“After the photo shoot we did, I was hoping I would run into you again... I’m glad I didn’t have to wait so long. Maybe if I keep walking around here, I’ll bump into you again before I know it.”

“Oh...yeah.”

“Heh-heh, so thanks for giving me something to look forward to on my walks. Anyway...a crowd is starting to gather, so I’ll leave you to it now. Have a good evening, Kaori. You too, Night...”

“Oh, okay!”

“Woof!”

Miu waves and leaves. As I watch her go, Kaori asks me a question, an unreadable look on her face.

“Um...Yuuya?”

“Yeah?”

“Are you...uh...are you and Miu an item?”

“Wha—? No, no, no, not at all! It’s like I said, we just happened to do a photo shoot together. Someone like Miu is completely out of my league.”

“No way! You’re—!”

“I’m...?”

“Ah! Sorry! I-it’s nothing...!”

I’m not sure what she was going to say, but if she says it’s nothing, then I guess it’s nothing.

I tilt my head questioningly, and just as we’re about to move on...

“Stop! Thief! Stop that man!”

...I hear a shriek. As I turn to look in the direction it came from, I find an old lady on the ground, desperately reaching out toward a man in a black tracksuit who is sprinting away as fast as he can.

“I-it’s a bag snatcher... What should we do?!”

As Kaori stands rooted to the spot, unable to react because of the shock of what’s happening, I immediately sic Night on the man.

“Night! Get him!”

“WOOF!”

Night barks once and bounds away with astonishing speed.

“N-Night?!”

Kaori is still staring at Night in awe when I take her by the arm and rush to the old lady on the ground.

“Ma’am, are you all right?”

“I—I am...but my bag...”

The lady looks upset, so I reassure her as best as I can.

“It’ll be okay. I’m sure we’ll— Oh, look!”

“Hmm?”

She looks where my finger is pointing to find Night dragging the thief back over to us, his jaws clamped tightly on the purse snatcher.

“S-somebody help! This damn mutt is—?!”

“Woof.”

Both Kaori and the old lady stare dumbfounded at the sight of Night slowly dragging a man several times his size toward us.

“Could you call the police, Kaori?”

“Oh... Yes, I’m on it!”

Kaori grabs her smartphone from her bag and dials the number to call the cops, when—

Night releases the man he has dragged over to me, believing his job is done. The man seizes the opportunity and quickly stumbles to his feet. He lunges for me.

“You...! Who the hell do you think you’re messing with?!”

“Gasp!”

“Yuuya?!”

Brandishing a knife in his hand, the thief desperately tries to slash me with it.

Unluckily for him, I’ve got experience vanquishing beasts much quicker than he is. I grab the forearm of his knife hand and twist it back around to the outside of his body without breaking a sweat. The man drops the knife in pain.

“Arrrrgh!”

“Hyah!”

Without giving the thief another chance to escape, I sweep his legs out from under him and secure his arms behind his back right where he falls.

“Whew...”

““““Whooooo!””””

“Huh?”

I look around, startled by the cheers that have suddenly erupted from the crowd surrounding us. Before I know it, people rush me and start clapping.

While I’m completely stunned by what’s happening, Kaori runs over.

“Are you okay, Yuuya?!”

“What? Yeah. I’m totally fine.”

“Thank goodness... I was so worried. Please don’t do something so reckless again!”

“I-I’m sorry...”

It’s not surprising that what I did seems dangerous from everyone else’s point of view...

As I apologize to Kaori, I make sure to praise Night for catching the thief. I can also give the bag back to its rightful owner now.

After the police arrive, responding to Kaori’s report, I hand the man over. They express their gratitude, too.

It’s hard to believe a time has come when I’m actually able to enjoy going to school.

That idea would have been absolutely unthinkable for the old me.

So I guess it’s only natural that I feel kinda lonely on my days off.

“...Still, we have to get this forest conquered quickly, right, Night?”

“Woof!”

This weekend, Night and I are going to explore as much of the forest as we can so that we can start venturing into the depths sooner rather than later.

I want to seek out some enemies I’ve never seen before and make their power mine.

...And once I’ve conquered this forest, it’ll be time to take our first steps outside of it. I’ve got a whole new world to explore, so I might as well make the most of it.

“All right...shall we head out?”

I fire myself up once more and make my way into the depths of the forest with Night by my side.

On the way there, we take down a Goblin General and a Devil Bear. We also run into a King Orc—Night’s favorite.

Last time, I had beat the King Orc with a surprise attack, so this time I want to face one head-on.

Coincidentally, Night has leveled up a lot since he came home with me, and his stats have seriously improved. He can take on a King Orc all by himself now.

After Night takes his revenge on the monster, he vocalizes a brave and gallant howl. It’s still cute, though.

After battling familiar foes for a while, I finally come across a monster I’ve never seen before.

“Wow, that’s a...”

It looks like a deer, and its head is framed by two mighty crystalline antlers. Each antler is a different color; one is a deep crimson, and the other has an azure hue.

I’m standing there, completely captivated by its majesty, when

Night begins to paw quietly at my feet.

“Woof?”

“Oo-oops, I was spacing out...”

That’s no good. Get distracted for one second in this world and you don’t know what might happen...

I metaphorically roll up my sleeves and use my Appraise skill on the monster before me.

Crystal Deer

Level: 630, **Mana:** 15000, **Attack:** 10000, **Defense:** 10000,
Agility: 15000, **Intelligence:** 15000, **Luck:** 3000

“Crystal Deer”? That’s not very creative. Easy to understand, though...

I should probably focus more on its level and stats... They’re both higher than the King Orc’s. And that was an S-class monster...

Worse still, given that mana stat, I wouldn’t be surprised if it uses magic...

“Well...what should we do?”

“Woof...”

Night seems to be thinking the same thing. Suddenly, I get the feeling that something is watching me.

I slowly peek toward the source of the stare only to find the cause of my current anxieties looking straight at me.

“B-but how...? While it could have noticed Night, I’ve already activated my One with Nature skill...”

I don’t understand the reason, but the monster seems to have sensed my presence and is now on guard.

...Okay, okay. I shouldn’t give in to pessimism just yet, but I wish I’d remembered that I still haven’t completely mastered One with Nature...

Besides that, the monster already knows I’m here, so there’s no chance of launching a surprise attack. This is going to have to be a straightforward strike.

I take the Absolute Spear in hand and spring forward with Night.

“Graaahhh!!”

“Is that really the sound a deer makes?!”

The moment Night and I charge the beast, the Crystal Deer bellows a strange cry and stampedes forward.

Those crystal antlers are sharp. If they catch either of us, we’ll be done for.

Night and I spring away in opposite directions to avoid them. As soon as Night lands, he jumps back into the fray.

“Woof!”

“Graaah!”

A black vapor-like substance begins to rise from Night’s body, and the dog is suddenly more agile than ever before.

The first time I met Night, I saw the same black stuff gushing out because the King Orc had wounded him. But the pup billowing black vapor now is easily tough enough to take on those old foes.

As Night bears his sharp claws down upon the Crystal Deer, the deer quickly swings its head to the side to stop the blow with its antlers. The vapor must mean that the deer is much more powerful than the monsters we’ve encountered so far.

But...

“You have more than one opponent!”

I lunge forward with a spiral thrust of the Absolute Spear.

As the Absolute Spear flies toward the Crystal Deer, clad in layers of wind, the monster counters with flames that shoot from between its antlers.

“What the—?!”

I knew it! It can use magical attacks after all.

I’d figured that something would come from its mouth, though...

My prediction of magic may have been on point, but I’m still not used to dodging magic attacks, and I get caught slightly in the deer’s flames.

“HOT!”

“Woof?!”

“I’m okay!”

I signal to a shocked Night to stay put as I drop to my knees and put the flames out by rolling on the floor.

...Luckily, the clothes I inherited from the sage stop the fire from reaching my body, but my face and other places where I don’t have the same protection are quite toasty.

With some distance between myself and the Crystal Deer, Night leaps back into action.

“Woof!”

“Graaah!!”

“Huh?!”

This time, the Crystal Deer doesn’t attack with fire, but with torrents of cold water.

“It looks like this thing can use two different types of magic...!”

Obviously, I’m not up to date on the characteristics and nature of different kinds of magic, and I have no idea how it’s handled in this world, but I’m still surprised that the Crystal Deer can use more than one type.

...It was probably stranger for me to just up and decide that only being able to use one kind of magic was the norm... I should learn

something from that.

The jets of cold water stop Night's attack in its tracks, and the dog falls back slightly.

...I think it'll be more effective to assign each of us a clear role to play rather than to keep trying to land a simultaneous attack. If we don't, things could get sticky...

"Night! Can you do something to make an opening?"

"...Woof!"

Night appears to think a little before he lunges toward the deer with a *Leave it to me!* bark.

"Woof!"

"Graaaaaah!!"

Night doesn't run the Crystal Deer straight down, instead preferring to make the most of his speed to confuse the beast as he bounds closer.

The Crystal Deer shoots jets of both fire and water in a bid to obstruct Night, but intercepting the nimble young pup proves to be no easy task.

And then—

"Chomp!"

"Graaah!!"

Night has his mouth around the Crystal Deer's throat.

The Crystal Deer wails as Night's teeth sink deeper into its neck, and it desperately attempts to shake the dog off.

Thanks to Night's attack, I now have an opening.

"Now...!"

"Graaah?!"

This time, I forego the spiral throw and decide to lunge forward and thrust my Absolute Spear right toward the Crystal Deer's throat.

Anticipating my attack, Night lets go of the monster.

As the Absolute Spear pierces straight through, I slash its point upward.

"Graaaaaah-grah-graaah!"

The Crystal Deer falls to its knees as blood splatters everywhere and soon disintegrates into scattered motes of light.

"We...we won..."

"Woof..."

I wouldn't call it a narrow victory, but somehow, it's still taken a mental toll...

While my clothes stopped the flames from spreading when I got burned, this battle sure highlighted the crudeness of my fighting abilities and my inability to adapt. Still, it's not as if I was brought up on the battlefield. I can't help it...

"The farther we venture into the Weald, the smarter we're going to

have to fight, huh? It'll be excellent training for when we leave this forest, though."

"Woof!"

Night nods and barks as if he's thinking the exact same thing. I give him a pat before I go and check out the drop items the Crystal Deer left behind.

Pelt of the Crystal Deer—The pelt of a Crystal Deer. It feels luxurious to the touch and is popular among the upper classes. While it does offer some resistance to cold, the effect is negligible.

Meat of the Crystal Deer—The meat of a Crystal Deer. This lean meat makes for an easy meal thanks to its gentle flavors, and it complements many other foods.

Antlers of the Crystal Deer—The antlers of a Crystal Deer. These antlers are made up of two special crystals: A Flame Crystal and an Aqua Crystal. This item can either be sold for a tidy sum or used to make Mana Weapons infused with magical abilities.

"Wow, nice!"

I'm surprised to find that I've acquired items that are much more valuable than I was expecting.

The pelt feels every bit as smooth and lovely as the explanation suggests. Although it still doesn't hold a candle to Night's. I totally get why royalty and nobility would love it, though.

The meat sounds tasty, so that's nice.

The problem, though...is the antlers.

If the explanation message is to be believed, they can be sold for a hell of a lot of money. Not only that, but they can also be turned into a Mana Weapon, although I don't exactly know how. Still, it would be pointless to make a Mana Weapon with my current abilities, so I'll just exchange it for money.

"All right, let's check out this Magic Stone next. Looks like we have yet another candidate for money conversion."

I begin to Appraise the Magic Stone.

Magic Stone: S—Rank S. A special ore that can be obtained from monsters with mana.

"So the monster was S-class after all."

It looks like the farther we go into the forest, the more S-class monsters become the norm.

Oh well. Looks like I've had another huge windfall! Yay! ...It's crazy, though. The sheer amount alone freaks me out every time I

cash out. Being poor for so long has totally shredded my nerves when it comes to money.

If I put all this money in the bank, they'd probably have some questions for me, so I feel grateful to have my Item Box instead.

...All in all, nothing too crazy so far. Now...

“...I wonder what this is...”

“Woof?”

Night's gaze also falls on the item in front of us. He tilts his head in confusion. Before us sits a palm-sized cube.

“What could this be...?”

I rack my brain for a possible answer as I activate my Appraise skill.

Portable Lavish Open-Air Bath Set—A rare drop item acquired from a Crystal Deer. These portable baths include hinoki wood baths, stone baths, Jacuzzis, and even electrotherapy baths and are readily available for a long, hot soak anytime, anywhere. You can even choose the potency of each bath. As the tubs and the water are so clean, these baths never need any extra cleaning or care. This item also comes complete with a privacy protection shield that enshrouds bathers in a special veil that makes them invisible to the outside world.

“Baths?! A monster dropped baths?!”

All I can do is scoff at the ridiculousness of such a drop item. Why the hell would something like a Crystal Deer drop baths?! How are they related in any way?!

...The best—although still tenuous—link I can come up with is that the Crystal Deer uses flames and water, and if you put the two together, you get warm bathwater. Could that be it? If that really is the case, what wasted potential! Not that I'm complaining. It's kinda nice to receive something recreational.

In any case, I can't go making any judgments until I dip a toe in, so I try setting the baths up. A translucent board immediately appears. It lists options like bath type and potency and whether I want to activate the invisibility veil.

I want to try it first without the veil to see what it's like, so I select that option. The cube rises out of my hand and is soon replaced by a grand hinoki wood bath.

“...Whoa...”

“...Woof...”

In front of me is a very luxurious bath with enough space to comfortably fit five people.

“Wow... I wanna get in right now, but it's a little dangerous around

here.”

For the moment, I make do with a quick visual inspection of the bath with and without the veil. I then take a quick look at the other bath options and put them away.

When I activate the veil, the bath really does become invisible. It's as if it's not there at all! But from the inside, you can still see everything outside. It's a technological marvel!

When I put them away, the baths simply shrink back down into a tiny palm-sized cube and return to my hand. The portability is super convenient.

The rare drops I've been getting lately have mostly been small—okay, maybe not so small in the case of the baths—commodities that are super useful. I used to prefer acquiring accessories and the like, but now I think I prefer these items.

I was satisfied enough that I managed to get another Hairbrush of the Pig King for myself...but these baths make me even happier.

...All right.

As I decide what to do next, Night makes a noise.

“Hey, Night. After we've explored the forest a little more, how about we go home and fire up one of these baths?”

“Woof? Woof!”

Forgive me, Night. I know I promised we'd head deeper into the Weald, but I just can't resist the thought of a nice hot bath... I am Japanese, after all.

After Night consents, we continue our travels in the forest a little longer, then return home to enjoy a long, relaxing soak.

Yesterday, we cut our hunt in the forest short to test out the baths, but today, we've made it quite far into the woods.

...I mean, the bath was worth it... Maybe you can't understand if you're not Japanese... It just is, okay...?

I'm still in the prime of my youth, but I get it now. When I think of old people talking about how they love the taste of a warm cup of sake while soaking in the tub, I understand. Bathing feels damn good.

At any rate, after recovering some energy and setting back out into the forest, Night and I encounter a new adversary.

“Night! It went that way!”

“Woof!”

“Shaaahhh!”

The enemy we discover is an armadillo monster with a back covered in long, sharp porcupine-like spines. I guess it would look more like a hedgehog to some people, but I find my description of *an armadillo that grew spikes* much more accurate.

Its stats look like this:

Needle Roller

Level: 610, **Mana:** 3000, **Attack:** 20000, **Defense:** 17000,
Agility: 25000, **Intelligence:** 8000, **Luck:** 2000

Its level is lower than that of the Crystal Deer we fought yesterday, and none of its stats are comparable. The most dangerous thing about it is that it can roll up into a ball and shoot forward as fast as a bullet. The spines that stick out of its back seem strong and hard. They're tough enough to go toe to toe with the Omnisword and the Absolute Spear.

...Well, that's not quite right.

When up against the Omnisword, the Needle Roller aims its spines against the flat of the blade, so I can't slash down at it properly. I have the same problem with the Absolute Spear. The Absolute Spear may always be able to hit its mark, but if that mark is able to cleanly sweep the spear away, all it does is come back to me. The throws I've been using to one-shot monsters with the Absolute Spear are really strong, but even those are being brushed aside. When swept aside, the Absolute Spear still considers its mark hit, so it just keeps returning to my hand.

I guess when it comes to fighting S-class monsters, Absolute Spear throws don't count for much unless you have the element of surprise. Maybe I was just lucky with the King Orc.

I bet the Crystal Deer would have done the same if it hadn't been for Night's help.

I don't want to think of the damage the spines of an S-class monster could do to me if they stabbed me.

Night leaps out of the way as the Needle Roller comes charging toward him. The monster smacks into a tree and immediately unfurls, returning to its normal form as it lands. It quickly curls back up and then leverages the tree for a burst of speed, this time hurtling in my direction.

"Kishaaahhh!"

"Ugh!"

I barely manage to dodge the Needle Roller, and my cheek has been slashed quite deeply.

"Argh! It hurts...!"

"Woof?"

I warily try to put some distance between myself and the Needle Roller as Night comes running over. He looks up at me as if to ask *Are you all right?*

"Yeah, I'm fine. Can't say the same for that thing, though. It's been rolling around so much that it looks like it's tired itself out."

"Woof!"

Just as I surmised, the Needle Roller appears to be getting tired, and its movements have become dull and slow. Night and I are worn out, too, but the fact that we're two against one gives us the advantage.

"Shall we get it over with? Focus..."

"Woof!"

"...Shaaahhh!"

"Watch out! It's coming back for more...!"

Back in its ball form, the Needle Roller charges full speed toward us.

Night nimbly jumps away, but I stay rooted to the spot until the Needle Roller is just close enough...because after studying the Needle Roller's movements, I've come up with a plan. Now it's time to put it into action.

Desperately trying to suppress my instinct to dodge, I wait for the perfect moment.

And then—

"Now!"

"Kishah?!"

In the split second before the monster plows right through me, I dive to the side. But the Needle Roller is going too fast to slow down. It unwillingly thunders past me before crashing into the rocks up ahead.

The Needle Roller has high defense stats, so even though it was rolling very fast, the impact shouldn't be enough to deal too much damage.

But that wasn't my intention anyway.

"Kishaaahhh!"

"Yes!"

After slamming so hard into the rocks, its sharp spines are now a liability. The spikes are firmly jammed in, and the Needle Roller can no longer move.

It's desperately waving its arms and legs around in the air to get free, but the spines of the armadillo monster are too long, and the monster is immobilized.

If it had been able to shoot the spines out at me, then this fight would have probably ended differently, but luckily it doesn't seem to be capable of that.

"Hyah!!"

"Kishaaahhh!!"

Now that it can't move, I'll be able to hit it with the Omnisword. No amount of armor can save it now.

I immediately make the Omnisword materialize in my hand and activate my Detect Weakness skill. I aim at the most vulnerable part of the monster and cleave my sword down in one sure swing. I may be capable of slashing again, but the monster deserves a quick death.

The Omnisword slices cleanly into the Needle Roller's weak spot and then all the way through the rest of its body without the slightest resistance.

The Needle Roller lets out one final scream before succumbing and vanishing into specks of light.

"We...did it..."

"Woof..."

"Thank you, Night."

Night has wandered over to me, and as I bundle him into my arms, he licks the wound on my face.

I quickly grab an Herb of Complete Healing Juice and down it in one go. I still have plenty more, so I'm not too worried about conserving any.

The juice quickly permeates my entire battle-worn body, and I recover my vitality instantaneously.

"You have some, too, Night."

"Woof!"

As I give Night some juice, a message finally appears.

"You have gained a level. **Unity of Body and Mind** skill acquired. **Mental Fortitude** skill acquired."

"All right! I gained a level *and* some skills!"

"Woof!"

"Wait! Did you level up, too, Night?"

"Woof! Woof!"

Night barks, so I use my Appraise skill to check, and sure enough, his level is now higher than before. Way to go, Night!

After roughly assigning the BP from my level up, I take another look at my stats.

Yuuya Tenjou

Occupation: None, **Level:** 240, **Mana:** 6050, **Attack:** 8050, **Defense:** 8050, **Agility:** 8050, **Intelligence:** 5450, **Luck:** 8750, **BP:** 0

Skills: Appraise, Endurance, Item Box, Comprehend Languages, True Art of War: 8, Detect Presence, Speed Reading, Cooking: 7, Map, Dodge, Detect Weakness, One with Nature, Tame, Unity of Body and Mind, Mental Fortitude

Titles: Master of the Door, Master of the House, Stranger from a Different World, First-Time Traveler to a Different World

It looks like my True Art of War and my Cooking skill levels have gone up, too!

It's just my regular old cooking, so I can't really tell if it's improved

or not, but for True Art of War, I do feel that I've gotten better. My attacks are way sharper now.

I finish looking at my improved skills and decide to check out my new ones.

Unity of Body and Mind—Your mind and body are one, and you now have more control over your movements.

Mental Fortitude—Your resistance to mental attacks such as fear has increased.

“Ooh, both of these skills seem quite useful.”

I can probably take Unity of Body and Mind to mean that I'll be able to move my body more like how I picture it moving in my head.

And Mental Fortitude, too!

I was so scared when I was battling the Needle Roller and I saw it coming at me. But I didn't freeze up, and I was able to jump out of the way. Maybe that's why I earned it.

“Awesome... Shall we keep working to improve our levels?”

“Woof!”

“Oh, right, let's check out your stats now, too, Night.”

“Woof.”

I use my Appraise skill on Night as I give him a quick pet and check the results.

Night

Species: Black Fenrir, **Level:** 510, **Mana:** 10100, **Attack:** 10300, **Defense:** 10300, **Agility:** 15000, **Intelligence:** 10100, **Luck:** 10000

Note: Subordinate of Yuuya Tenjou

Hmm... It looks like his stats have increased similarly to mine.

The only differences are that Night has no BP, and his luck stat didn't go up. Maybe it was just this battle in particular, but then again, luck itself doesn't seem to be one of those things that goes up or down depending on whether you gained a level.

In any case, Night's stats have gone up in a nicely balanced way, especially his agility. He can definitely hold his own against S-class monsters now. In fact, it's probably fair to say it's thanks to Night that I was able to take on an S-class monster in the first place. None of my stats can measure up to beasts of that level. In all honesty, if I didn't have Night or these overpowered weapons from the sage, I'd probably be dead already. Although if I go by what happened earlier, some S-class monsters can still deal with those weapons. It's Night whom I owe the greatest debt to. And not just in battle, but because of all he's done for my mental state, too.

...All right! I'm gonna train and get so strong that I can knock the worst S-class monsters into the dirt on my own with ease. I feel pumped as I go check out the drop items.

Unyielding Spine of the Spiked Armadillo—A spine from a Needle Roller. Sharp enough to pierce through even the thickest steel, it is mainly used in the making of spears and arrowheads. Such weapons can be bought and sold for very large amounts of money.

“Sounds pretty dangerous...”

The spine is the only ingredient drop from the Needle Roller, but it looks like I was right to be afraid of getting stabbed by one of these.

That said, it really was an armadillo after all? That had just been my personal opinion. I'm not certain it's the same animal as the armadillo I know, though...

While wondering about the connection between the monster and Earth's armadillo, I pick up a magic stone. S-rank. Like usual.

Then—

“What the...? This looks like a toothbrush...”

“Woof.”

All I'm gripping in my hand is a single black toothbrush. Most likely a rare drop from the Needle Roller.

...But how can a rare drop from a Needle Roller be a toothbrush? What about all those armor-piercing spines? If you brushed your teeth with one of those, the inside of your mouth would be a horror scene, so surely the bristles on this toothbrush have to be made from something else. It makes me wince just thinking about it.

I use my Appraise skill to gingerly check the item's description.

Extreme Toothbrush—A rare item dropped by a Needle Roller. This toothbrush completely eliminates bacteria that cause bad breath and turns the user's teeth from a dull ivory to a brilliant white. It gets rid of plaque and tartar and makes brushing comfortable and fun.

“How efficient!”

Seriously, how good have these daily essential items been?! They're coming in really handy, but I still can't help but wonder if all rare drops are going to be like this. I've never really played any video games, but is this normal? I always thought rare drops were no good if they weren't things like weapons and armor. Or maybe that's just me?

“Whatever... Anyway, do you feel like going a little deeper into the forest, Night?”

“...”

“Night?”

As I put my drop items away and call out to Night, I notice Night is focused in one direction and staring in silence.

I follow Night’s gaze to find the rock that the Needle Roller had smashed itself into has crumbled into fragments, and in its place stands the entrance to some kind of cave.

“Huh? What the hell is that?”

“Woof...”

Night tilts his head as if he doesn’t know either and cautiously approaches the entrance.

“H-hey, Night, be careful!”

I call out to Night, who turns back and looks to me like he’s deep in thought.

“...Woof.”

It almost looks as if Night is telling me he wants to check out the inside.

To be fair, I’m also curious to find out what the deal is with this cave that appeared.

We just happened to run into the Needle Roller out here at the bottom of some cliffs. I never imagined a cave would suddenly open up.

We could always ignore it and proceed farther into the forest like we’d originally planned, but Night seems strangely interested in what’s inside. His animal instincts are telling us that there’s something in there, and his instincts are way more dependable than mine could ever be.

I, too, am interested in what exactly Night’s senses have picked up on, and I hesitantly follow the pup inside.

Up until this point, I’ve only ever seen forests in this world, so it’s my first time in a cave environment. I proceed carefully, prepared for any monsters that might suddenly jump out at me, but I can’t sense anything with Detect Presence. It’s way too early to let my guard down, though. The Crystal Deer was able to see through my One with Nature skill, so I wouldn’t be surprised if other monsters exist that are immune to my skills as well.

But when I think about things more carefully, it’s not just monsters that I should be wary of. If people live inside these caves, they could have set traps...and if I get caught in one of those, I don’t have any skills that can help me. At that point, I would just have to accept my fate.

On the lookout for both monsters and traps now, I inch forward, careful not to touch the walls or ground where I can avoid it.

Just as I begin to worry about how dark it’s getting, the flames of torches fixed to the walls flicker to life.

“Whoa! What happened?! Why did they suddenly light up like that?”

“Woof?”

Unlike me, who practically jumped several meters in the air, Night seems calm... I guess if Night isn't worried, then there's no need for me to freak out, either.

More importantly, if there are torches on the wall...that means other people could be here. I can't say anything for certain yet, but I still need to keep my eyes peeled for traps.

The cave becomes more mysterious by the minute. Still, I keep moving forward and eventually reach the heart of the underground complex. The space is quite expansive and is surrounded by countless torches.

“Where are we...?”

“Woof!”

“Hey! Night?!”

Night suddenly runs off, and I go chasing desperately after him.

That's when—



“Huh?!”

—I discover a skeleton clad in a robe propped up against the wall in a sitting position.

For a moment, I wonder if I need to draw a weapon, but I don't sense any movement. The skeleton appears to be well and truly dead.

...That was scary... If it weren't for my Mental Fortitude skill, I probably would have peed my pants.

While I dwell on my grim discovery, Night begins to paw at an object lying in front of the skeleton.

“Woof!”

“Hmm?”

I walk over to Night and find something lying on the floor by the skeleton's feet... It's a thick book.

“A book?”

What kind of book could it be? Interested, I open it up and peek inside. There I find a message:

To the person who finds me.

—The Sage

CHAPTER 2

The Sage and Magic

“Th-the sage...”

I stare dumbfounded at the book in my hands.

The man who wrote this is the same person from whom I received my house in the Weald...and all the weapons, armor, herbs, and all that other craziness... If it weren't for him, I would never have been able to do anything. It's thanks to him that I even have the barrier that protects my house...and if it hadn't been for that thing, I would have been toast the moment I stepped out of the magic door.

A book by the sage, huh...? And it's addressed to the person who finds him...

I open the cover with trembling fingers.

Inside, there's a message.

Now then...shall we speak about the past? About my past.

I am afraid it is not a very interesting tale, but I would like you to hear it all the same.

—I was always a very capable man. From the day I was born...there was never anything I could not do. Whether it was casting magic or wielding a sword, cookery or singing, painting or smithing...I had the ability to do anything I set my mind to and master it.

As a result, though I was a mortal man, I wandered into the territory of the gods.

There were not many events that truly astonished me in my life, but there was one event that did: When the divine beings themselves recommended that I become one of them.

I am sure any man would have been beyond delighted with such a proposal. For he would ascend and take his place among the gods. He would obtain immortality. And even though I was already capable of reanimating the dead, my own immortality had remained out of my grasp. Yet...I refused.

Those around me could not believe it. Some even criticized me and called

me arrogant. But still...I refused.

—I may have spoken much about myself so far, but to you who are reading this, I have a message:

You had the ability to come as far as this cave. I shall already be dead by the time you read this, so I do not know to what degree you recognize the abilities inside yourself. Yet one thing I do know is that the abilities you are blessed with are greater than you could ever imagine. Especially for a human being.

I do not know how you feel about other people. Still, I imagine those around you regard you in much the same way they do me...with fear.

Perhaps I speak out of turn, but as your predecessor, I warn you: Do not become like me.

...I refused to become a god...for I wanted to die as a human. But having lived as a man, capable of anything, ascending to the level of a living god...this was the only way I could maintain some humanity.

I do not wish for you to meet the same fate. Selfish as it may be.

“...”

Having read up to this point, I admit that I'm a little surprised by the sage's compassion. I assumed he had built his home so far in the forest because he was coldhearted and didn't really care about the business of others. But in reality...I feel sorry for him. He was someone whose abilities meant he was desperately lonely, someone who had lost every single means to die as a human apart from natural causes.

If what the sage says is true, my abilities are some of the most powerful among men. And if I continue along the path I'm on, others might begin to fear me.

...I don't want that to happen...but then, what do I do...?

Concerned about the sage's warning, I keep reading.

It might seem intimidating, but there is a surprisingly simple way to avoid this problem. At least, it is simple for people who are not me.

You must find people you trust.

They may be friends, lovers, family... But you must find those who will stand by you even after you bare your heart to them.

When I was alive, I had no trouble forging new relationships, but alas, I never was able to find someone I could be completely honest and open with. If time allows, you must boldly and purposefully seek such people out.

“O-okay...”

I...guess he's right...but until recently, I didn't have any friends. This sounds like it'd be difficult for a guy like me... Perhaps the sage didn't suffer the same kind of social anxiety, but...

You will be all right. You need not rush... Take your time and find lifelong friends at your own pace. Use this as an opportunity to not only

make friends, but to also face your fears.

Is he a mind reader?!

And his words...they remind me so much of Gramps.

Didn't he say something similar to me just before he passed away...?

It might take me a while to get there, but I *will* figure out how to get there.

I turn the page again. There's more.

I am not certain of how I can both thank you and apologize to you for having to read an old man's ramblings, but if there is any one thing that you would like to know...I will tell you.

"Huh?"

I look down at the words on the page and make a face.

Something I want to know...maybe this guy really is a mind reader.

But after such a sudden offer, nothing immediately comes to mind.

There are lots of things I want to know...

"Maybe...magic...?"

I've seen magic on several occasions since I first arrived in this world, but I haven't been able to use it. Maybe that's what makes it so appealing to me. I get excited just thinking about being able to shoot flames from the palms of my hands.

As I ponder my question, the once blank portion of the page begins to fill with words.

It seems you are interested in magic.

"So he is a mind reader!"

Now I'm certain of it!

More and more words appear in the blanks, but the book doesn't respond to my outburst.

I leave all my magical theories in the following passages... However, I do not know how much you already understand about magic... No, you do not even seem to be of this world.

"He's able to understand that much?!"

It seems like the sage is able to see through everything, but I still didn't expect him to grasp that. How does he do it? Who is he...?

Unfortunately, it matters not how many magical theories I teach you. Unlike the people of this world, who have mana pathways inside their bodies, you cannot use mana.

To explain it simply, these pathways act much like blood vessels. Unlike you, people from this world generate blood and mana in their hearts and circulate both throughout their bodies. However, you do not have any pathways. Therefore, you cannot use mana.

"For real?!"

Then...does that mean I'll *never* be able to cast any magic...?

But if I don't have the right wiring for it, then what can I do?

If I'm honest with myself, I've dreamed about one day being able to

use magic since the moment I arrived here, so I'm kinda disappointed.

However, the sage's words do not end there.

Therefore, you will need to acquire some mana pathways of your own. I no longer exist in this world, but my mana pathways were so valuable that they could have easily been considered a wonder of this world. Rather than extinguish them forever, I would rather they pass on to you.

"Huh?"

So that means mana pathways can be passed from person to person? But isn't it just a waste to pass something so precious down to an outsider like me?

In response to my worries, the sage's words gradually begin to fill up the page with messages of reassurance.

If they are not used, they will simply vanish. But you are here now. The fact that the inheritor of my mana pathways happens to be from another world matters not to me. Because if someone is capable of wielding them, then they should. I wonder... How many people are even capable of making it to this place at all...?

"..."

Now that he mentions it, Owen and the others also made a big deal about how dangerous this area is.

You need not think too deeply. Just be glad that you have happened across the greatest mana pathways this world has ever seen.

"M-maybe I'm not able to simplify things as much as you do..."

It's a bit late now, considering that I'm already using the sage's house and his weapons, but I feel almost guilty that he's been so good to me. Thank you so much...

...In any case, you are someone worthy of these powers, and as long as it helps you work toward a life that you can be proud of, I have no objections bestowing them upon you.

"..."

Here I am, being persuaded to accept something amazingly valuable by a man who no longer exists in this world. But it is as he says... I have to do my best to become the kind of person who can wield these gifts with my head held high.

As soon as I come to my decision, the sage's book begins to glow.

"Huh?!"

Now that you have resolved to inherit my powers, let us get it over and done with. These are my mana pathways, which this world deems so precious...

Up until this point, I have been turning the pages of the book by hand. But now the book suddenly leaps out of my clutches and hovers in the air. Then the pages begin to flip rapidly by themselves.

"What the—?"

From my feet, rows upon rows of letters crawl up my body,

undulating like snakes. The words begin to engulf my entire being from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes, until eventually they cover my whole body and sink beneath my skin.

My heart suddenly begins to burn as if it's been set ablaze, and I fall to my knees. Heat courses through my body, then quietly dissipates.

"Huff... Huff... Hah... Hah..."

"Woof?"

Night looks at me with concern as I desperately try to catch my breath and calm down. When I finally manage to give him a faint smile, the book, which had been emitting light, dims and drops to the floor. Its pages lay open directly in front of me.

It appears that you have successfully inherited my mana pathways. Now you are ready to learn magic. As I mentioned before, this book is filled with my magical theories...but there is no particular necessity to read it all. Perhaps others would need to scrutinize every last syllable with the greatest care to fully comprehend it, but as someone who has inherited my mana pathways, you do not. My magical theories are already carved into those pathways at a fundamental level.

Still panting on the ground, I turn the pages of the book—half to check if what he says is true—and sure enough, there they are. The pages are jam-packed with all sorts of magical information.

I have no idea what any of it says. It's full of what looks to be magical jargon. I was dreading having to read and understand all of it before I could learn any magic, so I'm thankful that the sage said it shouldn't be too hard to follow. I know I have the Comprehend Languages skill, but it still looks like gibberish to me...

After a few glances here and there, I turn to the final page, which concludes with some more words of advice.

...I realize that I have spoken of a wide variety of things, but I hope that you who are standing here reading this will live a long and happy life. After me...there need never be another person whose existence must hover between human and other. I have no doubt that you will experience irreparable pain during your lifetime. But it is for that reason, too, that you must walk a path free of regrets. I just hope that this book and my magic can be of use in helping you forge that life.

I wish you all the best.

—The Sage

"...Thank you, Sage. I hope that you also find peace..."

I store the book in the Item Box and clap my hands together in prayer in front of his remains. Night imitates my gesture next to me by closing his eyes and bowing his head. After a while, we lift our heads, and I turn to the pup.

"All right, Night... Shall we go home?"

"Woof?"

Night tilts his head as if to ask *Are you done?*

“Yeah, I think that’s enough for today. Besides, I want to sink my teeth into the sage’s book already. Maybe you’ll even be able to learn some magic, too, Night.”

“Woof!”

Night nods happily and, just like he did when we first discovered the cave, leads us back home.

Magic is a manifestation of the imagination.

As I quickly scan through the pages of magical theory in the book, I find a relevant line.

A manifestation of the imagination... Those are some dramatic words. I hope I’ll be all right.

No matter what sort of image you create in your mind.....

...Even if you try to use magic, if you have no mana to form the basis of a spell, you cannot do it.

That makes sense. Otherwise, the mana stat would be pointless.

If you do not begin by perceiving the mana within you, you will never be able to use magic.

—Which means that before I’m able to use magic, I’ll need to be able to control my mana.

As I read further and further into the book, it states that I’ll never be able to manipulate mana without learning to feel it first. One method it suggests is through meditation.

I’m not really sure how to do it... I guess I just close my eyes and sit down?

I settle on the floor in front of the book and close my eyes.

As soon as I do, I feel a presence next to me. I peek to see what it is.

Night is beside me, imitating me by sitting quietly with his eyes closed. It’s nothing short of adorable.

After we sit side by side for a while, I feel the area around my heart grow faintly warmer.

“...Hmm? What’s going on here...?”

The moment I notice the heat, it begins to burn through my entire body, like I can feel my own blood flowing.

“Wha...what am I feeling right now...?!”

I’m so confused. I’ve never felt something like this before. But I don’t feel tired or in pain or anything like that.

A translucent message materializes in front of me.

“Mana Manipulation skill acquired.”

“What?! You’re telling me that the source of this heat is my mana?!”

I hurriedly look up mana in the sage’s book. It seems that mana is a

lot like blood, always circulating within your body, and unless you're particularly aware of it, you don't feel anything.

"This must be the mana pathways I received from the sage in action...", I mutter to myself. Then Night, who had been meditating by my side, turns to me and barks as if he's trying to tell me something.

"...Woof! Woof, woof!"

"Hmm? Did you feel it, too, Night?"

"Woof!"

"Wow! Good job!"

It looks like Night and I both managed to acquire the Mana Manipulation skill.

Even though it's called manipulation, all I did was feel the mana flowing through my body.

Still, I'm not surprised that Night acquired the same skill. I'm from a different world, so I never had the right biology to be able to use magic, even though I have the stat for it. But Night is from here and already has all the internal circuitry he needs.

At any rate, after feeling my mana, I can already adjust the speed at which it flows around my body. I can charge it up in certain points and even move it as I please. It appears that even an outsider like me can learn to manipulate it in no time.

"Anyway, now that I can feel my mana and have learned to manipulate it, what's next?"

Once you learn how to handle your mana, the rest is simple. If you would like to cast flames from your palms, for example, gather your mana at your palm and imagine yourself firing flames from that point. While long incantations and the like are sometimes utilized, these are only used as assistance to further define the mental image in the magic caster's head. They are not a requirement. But if you keep the spell's name in your mind, it will be easier to cast. Saying the name of the spell aloud and reciting it in your head have the same effect, so the question of whether to say it out loud or not is merely a matter of preference. In practice, however, you do not want your enemies to be able to anticipate your next move, so it is recommended to mentally recite spell names instead.

"Oh...so you don't need to say it out loud. It looks like just saying it in my head will be much more useful in battle..."

I bet this magic isn't going to be very useful on Earth, though. I can't imagine any situations when I would need to use it.

I continue to turn the pages of the book.

When you use magic for the first time, it's recommended to imagine water. Phenomena such as flames could cause an accident. Water results in comparatively less damage, but either way, please be careful.

"That was a close one! I was going to go with flames for my first

shot..."

If I hadn't read ahead a little, I could have caused some serious damage. I need to make sure I read all of the text about each subject before trying it out.

I tell Night to use water as well and promptly stick out my hand.

I imagine a floating, basketball-sized sphere of water in my palm.

...The book says that I should think of a name for the spell. How about Water Ball? It's a simple name, but it helps me link the spell name to the image I have in my mind.

After I have a concrete mental image, I try activating the spell.

"...Let's see if this works... Water Ball!"

Water immediately swells out from nothingness above my hand and eventually forms a sphere the same size as what I'd imagined in my mind.

"Whoo-hoo! I did it! I did it!"

"Woof! Woof!"

"Huh?"

As I stand there in awe of the ball of water in my hand, Night barks. I look over to see what's up and spy a sphere of the same size floating above his head, too.

"Wow! Way to go, Night!"

"Woof!"

I give Night an enthusiastic pet with my free hand.

"Good dog! It looks like we're magic users now!"

"Woof!"

I can't wait to try out more spells, but I need to do something about this water first.

I paint a picture in my head of me hurling the sphere as hard as I can toward a tree just outside the garden.

The next second—

"...Whoa...!"

"...Woof..."

—the ball of water smashes through several tree trunks. My jaw drops at its unexpected power.

Wow...it really does manifest identically to my mental image...

After using magic for the first time, I now understand a little more about it. Like how I seem to lose a small amount of mana each time I cast it. Although, if the feeling of losing mana I experienced after casting Water Ball is to be believed, it looks like I'll be able to cast that spell many, many times before my mana runs dry.

I'd just imagined the sphere of water when I imagined Water Ball, but after witnessing what I just did, I think I'll update that first mental image to include launching it at my enemies, too. I can still keep imagining it as a ball of water in my hand sometimes as well.

“...All right, let’s keep this up and practice some more!”

“Woof!”

After I pull myself together, Night and I continue training for as long as we can.

CHAPTER 3

Lexia and the Others

After splitting up with Yuuya, Owen and the others traveled back to the royal palace to inform the king of Yuuya's promised visit.

Last time, Lexia was attacked by an assassin, but this time, Owen and his team were more alert than ever, and apart from a few scrapes here and there, there were no new attempts on the princess's life.

“—Rise.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

Owen's gaze shifted to the man who sat directly in front of him.

A blond-haired, blue-eyed man dressed in resplendent clothing sat quietly in a towering throne.

Confronted with a gaze that inspired both affection and reverence, Owen was naturally nervous.

—Arnold von Arselia.

The king of Arselia and Lexia's father.

This audience at the royal palace in the capital of Montress was a private one, attended solely by King Arnold and Owen.

“So did you manage to find the young man?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. We found him in the Weald, just where Princess Lexia said he would be.”

“Good grief...the Weald... And you say that he is from a foreign land?”

“Yes. His name sounds very different from yours or mine. He also has black hair and black eyes, which I'm sure you'll agree is very unusual in these parts.”

“I see...”

Arnold listened to Owen's report intently and nodded.

Owen took it as a sign to continue speaking.

“There's one other matter, Your Majesty. Would you please admonish the princess? We'd barely known the man for a few minutes when she asked for his hand in marriage. It was all rather—ah!”

Owen quickly tried to clamp a hand over his mouth...but it was already too late.

The knight sheepishly looked back toward Arnold, only to be met with a blank expression and two piercing eyes staring straight back at him.

“What did you say just now?”

“N-nothing, I...”

“*What* did you say just now?”

“I—I didn’t mean to...”

“*What did you say?*”

Owen’s only option was to tell the truth.

It was not in the slightest because Arnold was silently beginning to draw the Grackle sword, an Arselian treasure, from its sheath...

Having been forced to report exactly what happened during their first meeting with Yuuya, Owen’s audience concluded with Arnold von Arselia brandishing his sword in blind fury.

“Who the hell does this guy think he is?! What kind of bastard is trying to seduce my beautiful Lexia?!”

“Arrrrgh! Why do all the members of the royal family have to be so crazy?!”

Noting his own slipup as partially responsible for the king’s rage, Owen set to work pacifying his king.

“Here it is...”

Somewhere in the capital city of Montress, in the back alley of a rough part of town—a place frequented by no one but criminals like pickpockets and vagrants—stood a robed and hooded figure.

The figure checked back over their shoulder every so often, and when they reached a certain point in the alley, they turned toward an ordinary wall and shaded their eyes with their hand. The figure performed a gesture like they were twisting a dial, and the bricks in front of them abruptly collapsed into nothing. In their place, a path appeared.

The figure made a quick, final scan of the area before disappearing inside, then the wall promptly returned to the way it had been.

As the figure proceeded down the pathway, they eventually found themselves in a wide, open space. The area was dimly lit by lanterns and looked almost like a campsite—impermanent and thrown together.

Gathered there were several individuals who concealed their identities with hoods or behind masks, drinking alcohol.

—But it was obvious from the atmosphere that drinking was not all they were doing.

This was a marketplace for information and...a place where people

could hire others to carry out certain tasks.

“If you distinguish yourself in this task, the position of our Cornes family will be truly cemented...”

The figure made a beeline for the counter, where an expressionless man stood washing cups and plates.

“I have a job offer.”

“...Doing what?”

“To find and kill a target.”

The man behind the counter offered no reaction at all to the daring request. Because all the jobs submitted in that place were brought forward with a backdrop of a hidden world of lawlessness.

The barman stopped washing dishes for a moment and took a bundle of parchments out from under the counter.

“...A register of the names of those who are available at this moment.”

The job petitioner—a nobleman—took the parchments and quickly scanned the backgrounds, stats, and rates of each of the names on the list, until he reached a certain sheet and stopped.

“...?! Are you telling me that...*that person* is available?”

“...That’s right. You’re in luck. They’re available...for now. But as you know, they’re unlikely to remain that way for long. Are you interested?”

“Y-yes, them! I want them! I presume there won’t be any issues with that, will there?” The job petitioner asked impatiently, but the other man behind the counter simply removed the parchment from the pile and pointed to another room, remaining as expressionless as before.

“In there. That’s where you’ll find them.”

“Th-thank you.”

The nobleman followed the barman’s instructions and made his way farther into the drinking area toward a private room. As he reached the door, he took a moment to steel himself before venturing inside.

“—Another job offer?”

If the figure in the room had to be described in one word, it would be *black*.

They were clad in a robe with a dark green hood and a strange black mask that completely covered their face. Blue eyes shone out from behind it.

The hooded figure was seated, but their overwhelming presence hung heavy throughout the entire room, threatening to crush the nobleman under its weight.

“A-are you...the Headhunter?”

Metal glinted at the nobleman’s throat.

“If you look to your neck, you’ll see.”

“Agh—!”

“Ooh...one more step and this will be a decapitation instead of a negotiation.”

With a small flick of the figure's fingers, the knife at the man's throat disappeared. He was covered in sweat, and his breathing was labored.

“Huff... Huff... Hah...”

“Perhaps I should have been less threatening. In any case, it seems as if there is little need to introduce myself. I am indeed known as the Headhunter...among other things.”

“Oh...I-I'm...”

The breathless nobleman began to open his mouth, when the figure in black stopped him with a finger to their lips.

“I'm only interested in whether you can pay. I don't much care for who you are.”

The nobleman frowned for a second at the Headhunter's sincere indifference but soon regained his composure.

“So you've come to offer yours truly a job. I'm sure you understand what that means? Hiring me is not cheap.”

“I-I'm fully aware of that! But there is a person who I desperately need taken care of!”

The nobleman removed a sheet of parchment from his breast pocket.

“Some gossip that has fallen into my lap of late.”

“Oh...”

Taking the parchment, the dark figure scanned the information contained within.

“...Ah, I see. This is related to the attack on the first princess... It says that the assailants lost their lives in the Weald that day, and the princess was saved...”

“Th-that's right. I sent a veteran assassin after her...he followed her all the way to that cursed place, yet somehow, only the princess made it back out alive...”

“Hmph... Everyone knows what kind of place the Weald is. The fact that your assassin continued to pursue her deeper into the forest in the first place tells me they weren't very clever... However, there is some truth to what you say. It is highly unusual that the princess was the only one to make it out. I heard that she had been separated from her guard, Owen. Which means for her to escape the forest alive... someone must have helped her.”

“This is why I need the Headhunter. I need you to kill the princess. The person who saved her may still be close by, however, so you'll need to tread carefully.”

“I see... Then the path forward is clear. First, I'll need to curry favor with the first prince—”

“What?! Wh-why...?!”

The Headhunter sighed in exasperation at the man, who was plainly upset.

“Someone like you...is not fit to be a nobleman. How do you intend to navigate the aristocracy when you appear so incapable of subtlety? If you think the Weald is dog-eat-dog, you should see how the upper classes behave.”

“Y-you think I don’t know that?!”

“In any case...I accept your offer. I will undertake the assassination of the first princess, just as you have requested.”

“G-good.”

“Now, for my deposit...five hundred gold coins should do it.”

“Th-that’s outrageous! ...Fine!”

As the nobleman left the room to prepare the deposit, the Headhunter sank back into their chair.

“How much longer must I continue to saddle myself with these jobs...?”

—The Guild of Darkness.

A gathering of criminals and a marketplace for illicit job requests.

Its halls were filled with the vilest of men and women, natural-born killers and some of the most dangerous individuals to ever stalk the city... And yet there were also those who did not necessarily belong to the guild by choice.

The encounter fated to change the course of the Headhunter’s destiny forever was just around the corner.

CHAPTER 4

Before the Field Trip

“I got carried away...”

It’s the next day, and I’m on the way to school.

I’m reflecting on my actions yesterday.

After staying up testing spells to the limits of my available time and imagination, I used up all my mana.

According to the sage’s book, I’ll recover soon enough, but using up all one’s mana is not recommended. The moment it runs dry, your body becomes completely drained. It makes you more tired than you’ve ever been before.

My body is so exhausted that it took all my effort just to stand up. This sucks so much.

If this were a battle, I’d be dead for sure.

There’s something else on my mind. Something I read at the end of the book...

What you’ve read so far are the results of my own research. This research is not commonly known among others, so it is up to you to carefully consider how you will use the information contained within this book.

It seems like all the stuff in the book was discovered by the sage. But after reading through it, I think some of it might be a little... unorthodox.

I know it’s unlikely, but if someone from the other world were to proclaim heresy when they see my magic in action or something, that could end badly for me. I’ve got to tread carefully.

Lately, I feel like the list of things I need to be careful of is constantly getting longer, but it hasn’t been all bad.

I’ve learned that the baths from my Portable Lavish Open-Air Bath Set are so potent that they can even restore mana!

Ahhh... Those rare drop items have been so amazing! I can’t live without them anymore.

Even the toothbrush has lived up to its description. The inside of my mouth feels so clean, and now my teeth are dazzling white. It's been surprisingly effective. It actually feels good to brush my teeth now.

After taking the time to appreciate my stuff a bit, I arrive at school.

I happen to get there at the exact same time as Kaori and Kaede, who both greet me with wide smiles.

"Hey, Yuuya! G'morning!"

"Good morning, Yuuya."

"Morning, you two."

As soon as I return their greeting, it occurs to me that Kaori and Kaede both seem excited about something. I wonder what it could be...

"Both of you are awfully smiley today. How come?"

""Seriously?!"

Kaori and Kaede exchange looks with each other.

"All righty...as you'll notice in your academic calendars, our class field trip is coming up next week... Are you all ready for it?"

After I briefly catch-up with my classmates, Ms. Sawada, our teacher, commences homeroom with this unexpected question.

"Wait, what?"

""""Yeah!""""

A field trip?! What? This is the first I'm hearing of it.

"Okay, then listen up. You students are on a path to becoming the future elites of our society. Many of our graduates from Ousei Academy go on to do brilliant things in every possible field. But life is cruel, and you are gonna have to learn how to deal with whatever crap it throws at you. Hopefully on this field trip, you get to experience how tough life can be. Then you'll be better mentally prepared to weather any challenges, no matter how bad they may be."

I wasn't expecting to hear about a field trip today, so what Ms. Sawada just said kinda flew over my head. Luckily, Yukine is seated next to me and on hand to explain things a little more simply.

"Teach didn't explain it very well, but the gist is that we're going on a camping trip to immerse ourselves in some new experiences. It's supposed to help some of us grow up a bit. It'll be one night, two days, and you'll probably receive a list of all the things you'll need in advance. You can just refer to that for the details."

"Okay..."

Thinking back on it, I only ever received the necessary textbooks; I never got an academic calendar. It's not like I've ever felt compelled to look at one, mind you... I used to hate school.

At least this field trip business explains why Kaori and Kaede seemed so excited earlier today. I guess they already knew that the

field trip is coming up.

Ms. Sawada continues to speak.

“That said, we can’t get any preparations underway until we’ve decided the groups, so I’ve taken the liberty of determining those for us already.”

““““Awww...””””

Many students in the class voice their displeasure.

“Come on, Ms. Sawada! Why won’t you let us decide the groups?!”

“Hear, hear!”

“She’s drunk with power!”

“All right, that’s enough. This isn’t an opportunity for you to complain. Don’t make me threaten you with more homework.”

““““.....””””

As soon as the threat of more work is invoked, the entire class pipes down. The weak cave in pretty fast, huh?

I watch Ms. Sawada breathe out a long sigh.

“As I said earlier, while we will be camping, it is first and foremost a field trip. One of the aims is, of course, to strengthen the bonds of friendship between you students, so if you just form groups with classmates you’re already friends with, you won’t make any new ones. This is an opportunity to get to know some classmates you don’t know very well yet. Got it, you guys?”

““““Okay...””””

I guess that means the academy has a certain strategy behind each of the groups.

I still don’t know many people other than Ryou, Shingo, and the others, so this actually helps me out.

But there is something that does worry me.

...What am I going to do about Night while I’m away?

It would be great if I could come and go to the house using magic, but going by yesterday’s magic practice, I think teleportation is still a bit beyond my level.

It’s hard to picture, for one. I’m not sure how I’d even attempt to do it.

As I put my head in my hands and agonize over the fact that I can’t mentally visualize teleportation well enough to be able to use it, Ms. Sawada writes out the groups on the blackboard.

“Here are your groups. The number assigned to each of you is your group number, so please go and sit together. Off you go.”

I check the blackboard and see that I’ve been placed in Group 5. I head over to where the rest of my group has already begun to gather. Sitting there are two familiar faces.

“Oh! Kaede!”

“Yuuya! Yay, we’re in the same group!”

I'm glad to see her there. And the other familiar face...

"Hey, Yuuya! Looks like I'm in your group, too!"

"Akira, right? I'm looking forward to getting to know you better."

"Hey, do you really need to add the '*right*'? Still? I'm Akira, aka our prince!"

"I think you've been introducing yourself long enough, Akira. Go away."

"How cruel!"

It looks like I'm on the same team as Akira, the guy from the soccer class.

The girl who so rudely interrupted him isn't someone I know, though.

She's pretty. A tall, slender girl with long black hair. Her expression makes it look like she's made of strong stuff.

"I'm Rin Kanzaki. You can just call me Rin. I'm looking forward to being in the same group as you, Yuuya."

"Yeah, me too, Rin."

I never used to like getting to know new people, but now it makes me feel kinda excited.

A spontaneous smile plays on Rin's lips, and she takes a long, hard look at me before nodding.

"I get it now... You live up to the hype."

"I what?"

"Don't worry about it; I was just talking to myself. And that idiot over there...if he'd just shut up for a damn second, maybe I could see a reason why people might call him a prince."

"R-really?! You'd recognize my legitimacy?!"

"But then you spout crap like that...so I doubt I'll ever feel that particular urge."

"Heeey!"

I'm thinking about how it's already proving to be a lot of fun being in this group when Kaede gets my attention.

"It looks like it's just the four of us. I'm looking forward to seeing how we work as a team."

"Me too. I don't get this chance very often."

When I was in junior high school, I was too poor to go on any field trips. Not that they necessarily would have been any fun if I did have the money...

Once she sees that we've all separated into our groups, Ms. Sawada starts talking again.

"Okay, now that you're in your groups, let's run through the outline of the field trip, and then I'll hand out information about what you'll all need on the day."

The class settles down and turns toward the teacher.

“First up, the location. We’ll be heading to a big piece of land owned by this academy. It’s surrounded by fields and forests, so don’t go expecting any home comforts. Now, about what we’ll actually be doing... I’ll leave that for you guys to look forward to hearing about when we get there. In any case, I want you to give it your all!”

She said she was going to explain everything, so why did she leave out the main points?!

I—I wonder what we’ll end up doing... Yukine said it would be like a camp of some sort, but...

More than that, she said we’re going to a huge piece of land owned by the academy... It’s crazy to think that this school has something like that at its disposal... It blows every other school out of the water.

It seems like Ms. Sawada really is done with her explanation, and she hands out some papers about what we should bring with us.

Uhhh...?

1. Yourself.

Is this a joke? If you don’t bring yourself, then who’s even gonna show up?

2. A bag—something of similar size to a rucksack is preferable.

Argh! Don’t just suddenly go back to being serious like that! I can’t keep up!

Right away, it lists something I’ll need to buy. I’ve never had enough money to travel before, so I’ve never needed anything like a rucksack.

Gramps loved to travel, though. Maybe there’s a bag still in the house that I can use. Hang on... Now that I think about it, I never saw Gramps go anywhere with a bag... What a mystery.

I guess I have plenty of money now, though, so I’ll just buy a new one. In reality, I’ve got my Item Box, so I don’t technically need anything new, but... I don’t want to cause a scene using something like that in this world.

I keep going down the list. It’s all changes of clothes, gym clothes... Other than the rucksack, there’s nothing else I need to go out and buy. That’s a relief.

But Kaede and the others seem to have other ideas.

“Hey, hey, what are you gonna bring?”

“Do you think we’ll need some playing cards?”

“Yeah... What do you think, Akira?”

“If you guys take care of the games, then I’ll stock up on snacks!”

“Wait! What? Cards? Snacks? Are we really allowed to bring those kinds of things?”

I’d been surprised by all of the extra items they were suggesting, but

now it's their turn to be taken aback.

"Huh? But we're going camping! We need to take things to have fun, too."

"Exactly. After junior high school, I don't think those things are banned anymore."

"Don't tell me this is your first time camping, Yuuya... You can always ask the Prince of Camping about—!"

"Quiet, you."

"Won't you let me speak for once?!"

Looks like I just don't understand anything. I thought games were banned on school field trips... Does that mean it's different for camping...?

Worrying about the gaps in common sense between myself and the others, I eventually decide that if there's nothing for me to prepare in particular, I'll just bring the things the sheet of paper tells me to.

"Finally! Time to kick back!!"

""""Yaaaah!!""""

When school ends, I head out with Ryou, Shingo, Kaede, Rin, and—

"I'm looking forward to spending time together today."

—Kaori makes six.

I told the others I didn't have a rucksack and maybe needed some of the other things on the list, so they insisted that we hang out and go and buy them together.

"I—I never thought I would e-end up hanging out with y-you, Kaori..." Shingo manages to stutter out. He seems a little nervous.

We invited Akira to come with us, too, but he had something to take care of and couldn't make it.

Originally, it was just the five of us, but Kaori was nearby when we agreed to hang out, so I asked her as well, and she agreed.

"I had no idea you two knew each other..."

"I know, right! You're the principal's daughter, and you have such a sophistication about you!"

Kaori smiles wryly as Ryou and Kaede speak to her.

"There's no need to make such a fuss. It's my father who is the distinguished one of us. Please just treat me as you would anyone else."

"A-are you sure...? In that case...it's nice to finally meet you, Kaori."

And just like that, Kaori manages to fit in with Kaede and the others without any problems.

This time, we won't stay in the area near the academy where Kaori and I ate crepes, and instead opt to travel farther out to a department store. I might not be familiar with the area, but Ryou and the others

are, so I can sit back and leave everything to them.

On the way, we talk about how Kaori and I met and why I transferred to Ousei Academy in the first place. Everyone's listening very intently.

"Wow, Yuuya...that's...amazing."

"Y-yeah. If I were in your shoes, I w-would have been way too scared to do anything..."

Shingo trembles a little when I tell him about what happened when we first met.

Kaori, perhaps out of consideration for my ego, left out the part where the thugs beat me up, so everyone is praising me to the roof... It's starting to make me blush...come on, now.

As we talk, we arrive at our destination.

"Let's shop in here! There's an arcade inside that we can play in, too."

We're standing in front of a huge department store with what looks like eight whole floors. As we stare up at the building, Kaori sounds a little bit emotional.

"This is the first time I've ever come to visit a department store in a group like this."

"Oh, me too," I admit.

"R-really?!"

It's not just Kaori who's never hung out in a department store with friends. I've never even hung out with this many people before. And the only times I ever went to an arcade were when Gramps took me.

Kaede's eyes are wide in surprise at my admission.

"How unusual. We seem to have discovered two members of an endangered species here..."

"Ha! An endangered species, huh?"

I can't help but crack a smile at Kaede's joke.

"Hey, guys, since it's a special occasion, why don't we make sure to show these two a good time?"

"Agreed. I wanna go clothes shopping with Kaori and Kaede after this, too."

"What a neat idea, Rin!"

"Slow down! Shouldn't we go and buy Yuuya's rucksack first?"

""Okay!""

Everyone agrees with Ryou that we should go and find the rucksack before we do anything else, so we enter the department store.

I don't have any particular preferences when it comes to baggage, so we find a rucksack quite quickly. Ryou and the others give me some advice about the other stuff I need to buy, and before I know it, I'm all prepared for the field trip.

Now it's time to kick back in the arcade.

“The arcade covers this entire floor, by the looks of things.”

“Whoa...”

“That’s amazing!”

Littering the rooms are crane games, video games, and other token-based machines.

“Hmm...it looks just like any other game center, but you guys are acting like it’s the first time you’ve ever been in one...”

“Who cares? Let’s just play some games!”

We don’t need to be told twice, so we head off to wander around the arcade. After a while, Shingo stops in front of a crane game.

“Th-this is from...!”

“What’s up?”

“Oh...n-nothing. It’s just that there’s a f-figure from an anime that I like...”

I follow Shingo’s gaze and arrive at the figure of a magical girl type of character.

“I-I’m not very good at these k-kinds of machines, though... And I d-don’t have very much money to play with, s-so I’ll leave it until next time.”

“Really? Well, since we’re here, I’m going to give it a go.”

I don’t particularly want anything, but knowing my luck stat, I might win something, so I decide to try on Shingo’s behalf.

“Oh! You’re gonna try, Yuuya?”

“Good luck!!”

It’s my first time playing one of these things, so I’m a bit nervous. I focus and direct the crane arm just where I want it.

Even though I’m a total beginner, the crane arm moves pretty much exactly where I want it to go. Is this yet another physical benefit of leveling up?

My hand slams down on the directional button as soon as the arm hits the spot I want. I don’t waver in the slightest. Besides, I’ve used my Detect Weakness skill to find out where my best chances to hit it are, so this has gotta be in the bag.

I stare intently at the crane and the box containing the figure and set my target.

As I fix my gaze on the box, part of it seems to almost glow. This must be where the box is most vulnerable. If I hit it here, the box will become unbalanced and fall into the hole.

I move the crane arm again to just where I want it and quickly press the button.

“A-are you serious?!”

“Wow...”

I get the figure in one try.

I honestly didn’t think it would work on my first go. After

considering the weaknesses in the prize placement, I thought I'd need at least one more attempt at it... I guess that particular spot was just better for knocking the prize down than I initially thought.

"Awesome! You did it on the first try!"

"Aren't these things kind of rigged as well? That's amazing!"

I don't know if it's rigged or not, but regardless, I give the prize to Shingo.

"Here. For you."

"R-really?! I—I can't accept s-something like this!"

"Winning this for you was the entire reason I played the game... How about you toss me a hundred yen and we'll call it even? It'll reimburse me the cost of playing, at least."

"I-if that's okay with you, Yuuya..."

After I swap the figure for a one-hundred-yen coin from a hesitant Shingo, his face lights up.

Having watched me work my magic, Kaede suddenly tugs on my arm.

"Y-Yuuya! Can you get this for me?!"

"What?!"

Kaede pulls me over to a machine with an enormous yet adorable kitty plush. I look down at the console and find out that someone has already loaded it with a whole bunch of money.

"There's already money in here. What if I lose...?"

"I don't care about the money; just give it a try!"

Feeling awkward about potentially losing someone else's money despite Kaede's insistence that it's okay, I tentatively give it another shot. I use the Detect Weakness skill just like before.

Just like the figure in the previous machine, a dim light begins to shine from a spot on the plush. I aim straight for it as I move the arm and strike.

"Hey, you got it!"

"Seriously?!"

Piece of cake.

"Thank you so much for this, Yuuya! I've wanted this plush for the longest time!"

Kaede hugs the plush tight as she thanks me.

Since I've got a winning streak going, all the others begin leading me over to the different machines that house the prizes they want.

"Hey, Yuuya! I really want this game! Can you try to get it for me?"

"I want this plush toy!"

"I've...never seen any of these things before, but I think this one is cute!"

Each and every time, I win the prize on my first attempt. Hmm... were crane games always this easy?

I know I'm activating my Detect Weakness skill and all, but it still seems too simple.

Ryou begins to speak with admiration.

"Hmm, after so many straight wins, this can't just be a coincidence. I've never seen anyone sweep all the crane game prizes so easily before..."

"Y-you haven't?"

"Ryou is right... This is my first time at an arcade, but even I can see how much skill Yuuya must have."

Even Kaori, my fellow arcade newbie, thinks something is up. Oh well. It's not like I've taken a loss or anything, at least.

After we tire of the crane games, we head over to the racing games.

"Um...am I going in the right direction?"

"No, you're going the wrong way, Kaori! You're going full speed in the *opposite* direction to where you're supposed to be going!"

"Make way! Coming through!"

"Hey, no fair! You're going so fast, Yuuya! What kind of driving technique is that?! I didn't realize you could do that in this game!"

"R-really?"

"Y-Yuuya... You're incredible..."

Despite being a complete beginner, I take first place. My fellow beginner, Kaori, gets dead last.

After playing some shooting games after that, we decide to take a break.

"Whew...I haven't had that much fun in ages!"

"M-me neither..."

"Hey, Yuuya, you're too good at all this stuff..."

"Agreed. He even set a new high score in the shooting game."

"Not to mention that *taiko* drumming game that Shingo introduced us to. My eyes couldn't keep up with you."

"Oh, um, anyone can do that if they memorize the music."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that..."

As each of my friends sighs, Kaori smiles warmly.

"This was the first time I went out with so many friends... It has been so much fun."

"Kaori...!"

Kaede's eyes begin to mist at Kaori's kind words, and together with Rin, she pulls Kaori to her feet.

"Hey, let's go and check out some clothes!"

"Sorry? C-clothes?"

"Yeah! We're high school girls. We need to look good! Which means we're going to take you to the upper floors and look at some clothes. We'll meet you boys back down here later."

"Why? Can't we just go with you?"

Ryou offers to escort Rin and the others. Kaede begins to smirk at him.

“Are you sure you want to propose that, Ryou? We girls can shop for much longer than you might think.”

“...I guess...we’ll just leave you to it, then.”

We split into two groups as the girls head off to the fashion corner on the top floor.

“Errr...shall we look at something down here, then?”

“Okay.”

“Sure.”

And with that, we guys start making our way to a different floor, too.

The lower floor of the department store is packed with miscellaneous book shops and some food stores.

We aren’t planning to buy anything in particular; we’re mostly just window shopping.

“F-fire!! Fire!!”

“Huh?!”

A customer suddenly begins to scream. At first, the other customers seem shocked and share dubious looks, but once they see the smoke filtering in from the upper floors, they begin to panic.

“Aaaaaahhh!!”

“Hey! Don’t push!”

“We need to get downstairs!”

The three of us exchange worried glances. Ryou whips out his smartphone and tries to contact Kaede and the others.

“...It’s no use. It’s not going through!”

“U-um, excuse me, but what floor did the fire start on?” I ask another customer trying to get through the doors, and they explain that it seems like it started in a corner of the arcade.

If we had done what we were supposed to, we would have evacuated the building and waited for the fire department, yet we find ourselves nearing an escalator to the floors above instead.

“That guy said it started in the arcade...that’s just under where Kaede and the others are. But what are we supposed to do about this smoke...?”

“I—I don’t know!”

There’s a good reason Ryou is panicking. The smoke is much thicker than expected, and the areas near the stairwell and escalator are starting to get hotter.

But as soon as I reach them, my body begins to move with a mind of its own.

“Y-Yuuya!! Wait! What are you—?”

“What the—?!”

I can hear Ryou and Shingo shouting behind me, but before I know it, I’ve already reached the next floor. It’s too late now, but I really should have thought a bit more rationally about this.

It’s just that the second I knew the girls were in trouble, I couldn’t stand there and do nothing.

“Gah!”

As I climb up each of the floors, the heat is getting more and more unbearable.

I’m wearing nothing but my school uniform, which offers no fire protection whatsoever. If I just rush in there, guns blazing, I’ll probably die, too.

It’s then when I suddenly remember something. I can use magic now.

“That’s right...! If ever there was a time to use magic, it’s now!”

At first, I think about generating a large volume of water, but fire appears to be damaging the floors and making them brittle. If I conjure water, then the floors would probably collapse completely under all the extra weight. I dismiss the idea.

There is something I can do first, though. I create a light veil of air and water to protect my body. I’m immediately freed from breathing difficulties and insulated against the harsh, overwhelming heat.

“Good, now that that’s out of the way...”

I stand before the fierce flames, steel my resolve, and jump into action.

The entire arcade floor is already completely ablaze. If I didn’t have magic, there would be no way for me to get past all this fire.

I quickly activate Detect Presence and check if there is anybody left here.

“Looks like this floor is clear...”

Once I confirm that everyone has escaped, I run up to the next floor.

As I desperately search for Kaori, Kaede, and Rin, I sense a group of three people close by.

Rushing over to the source, I immediately find Kaede struggling on the floor.

“Kaori! Kaede! Rin!”

“Y-Yuuya...?”

It looks like the trio were in the girls’ bathroom, so they didn’t realize there was a fire until it was too late. The fire alarms didn’t go off, either. Meaning they’re either broken or someone didn’t press the button to set them off in the first place. Why was this department store so unprepared?! I can’t help but feel bothered by that.

I activate my skill to make sure there’s no one else left on this floor.

It looks like it’s just Kaori and the others, so once I get these three

out of here, it'll all be over. The problem is that they're all unconscious now, so I'll have to carry all three of them out somehow.

I fashion all of our school jackets into something to help tie Kaori to my back. Then I get Kaede and Rin under each arm and run for the exit.

I bet all three of them have inhaled way too much smoke. I have to get them out of this burning building as quickly as possible.

There's one problem, however. I can't make it through the flames on the arcade floor carrying the girls like this.

"Here goes nothing..."

After a quick think, I decide to take action. A reckless action that only I am capable of—

"Raaarhhh!!!"

I stomp down as hard as I can. The fragile floor beneath us caves in, and we drop down to the level below. But we don't stop there. We keep falling.

As I hold tight to the three girls, we go right through the arcade where the fire first began, and hurtle toward the ground floor.

If we keep falling like this, then we're going to hit the bottom hard.

I quickly try to picture us cocooned by wind and pray that my magic works.

Sure enough, as we're almost at the floor, our speed drops dramatically, and we land safely. I make one last dash for the exit, kicking the door down on my way out.

"RAAAH!!"

As soon as we get outside in the open air, I see the firefighters are on the scene, working to douse the fire.

"Huff... Huff..."

"Hey! Are you okay?! Hey! We need stretchers over here!"

As I hand Kaori and the others over to the professionals, I collapse right where I stand.

"Huff... Arrrrrgh... I made it... *Hah...*"

I loosen my tie and breathe the fresh air deeply into my lungs.

"Yuuya!"

"Y-Yuuya!"

Ryou and Shingo seem to have escaped the fire without any major issues. They run over to where I'm an exhausted heap on the floor.

"Dammit...don't act the hero! We were worried about you!"

"Y-yeah, we were!"

"Oh...? Sorry...about...that..."

Ryou is right, though. What I did *was* reckless.

I know that I can use magic and that I was fully able to handle myself among the flames, but the others don't. I probably looked like a suicidal maniac running into the fire back there.

As expected, the firefighters are angry at me as well.



After a little while, the fire is put out, and things are much safer.

Later, I come to learn that the reason the fire alarms didn't go off wasn't because there weren't any but because they were broken. The fire itself, it seems, was caused by some sloppy wiring in the arcade.

In any case, Kaori, Kaede, and Rin, who had all been hospitalized, have finally woken up.

The firefighters managed to contact Kaori's father, and both Kaede's and Rin's parents, who immediately rushed to the hospital to be by their daughters' sides. All of them keep saying how grateful they are to me, but there's really no need.

"It's thanks to you that Kaori made it back to me alive... Thank you, Yuuya. Thank you so much for saving my daughter."

As I watch my friends' parents fighting back tears, it warms my heart, but...it also makes me feel lonely.

...There's no one in my family who would cry over me anymore...

I feel an unpleasant feeling starting to well up inside me, but the parents have asked me for an explanation about what happened during the fire, so I concentrate on that.

When they inquire how I managed to get everyone out with barely a scratch, I know there's no way I can tell them it was all because of magic. How am I supposed to talk my way out of this one?

Eventually, I settle on the explanation that I was just lucky. While it may still seem preposterous, at least I don't have to tell them what really happened, and they can all continue to live none the wiser.

After some good scolding and words of gratitude, I finally go home.

"I'm back..."

"Woof!"

As soon as I call out, Night comes to greet me.

"Night...did you wait for me this whole time?"

"Woof."

I pick the puppy up, and he nuzzles against my chest. Night never fails to melt my heart, and I can't help but give him a squeeze.

"Thank you, Night."

"Woof."

"Uhhh...you hungry?"

"Woof!"

Now I have Night. A pup so dear to me that he never, ever fails to bring a smile to my face.

CHAPTER 5

An Encounter in the Forest

“Hmm...I just don’t get it...”

“Woof?”

Right now, I’m trying to figure out how to use teleportation magic. The field trip is coming up soon, so I have to focus on learning this now for Night’s sake.

Yet I still can’t think of anything!

It’s difficult to imagine teleporting from one place to another in my mind. No matter how hard I try, I just can’t picture a destination clearly enough. I can only ever muster hazy images. Maybe it wouldn’t be going so badly if I had a better memory.

And what if I end up teleporting myself into a tree or a boulder? When I think of teleportation in those terms, I’m too chicken to even try.

“...This is no good. I can’t think straight. We should take a break.”

“Woof.”

I step back through the magical door and return to my house on Earth.

“...Huh?”

I feel something click in my mind and walk back through the door once more.

“...Hmm?”

“Woof?”

Night looks at me with a face that might as well say *What are you doing?* But I’m lost in my thoughts and don’t respond.

I feel like...all the pieces just fell into place...

“Th-that’s it!!!”

“W-woof?”

I give Night the shock of his life with my sudden outburst. I’m sorry, Night! But I finally get it now!

“That’s right...I was thinking about teleportation all wrong from the

start! If I think about teleportation in terms of a door or a gate, then that solves one of my problems!”

At least I can stop worrying about trees and boulders now!

“...Yeah, and if I could create a mechanism that shows those doors where to go, that would be perfect!”

If I could develop a kind of magic that could take pictures, for example, couldn't I combine that magic with my teleportation door magic and then just teleport to wherever that picture shows?

“Now that I've got it figured out in my head, let's try putting it into practice!”

“Woof!”

Knowing that I'm the type of person who needs to get to work as soon as inspiration hits, I immediately embark on developing this process. The resulting spell comes to me almost too easily, but in the end, I'm left with teleportation magic that allows me to go anywhere I want.

The only caveat is that it has to be somewhere I've actually been to. The first thing I did was develop magic that could take pictures, or rather, lets the brain store clear images, then I combined it with my teleportation door magic. I also experimented a little by memorizing a picture of somewhere I've never been before in the USA from a textbook and seeing if I could appear there, but it didn't work.

Hmm, maybe I have to be able to match an image in my head with an experience felt in my body for this magic to be successful. It's just a hunch, though.

The magic performs great, but it's still kinda inconvenient. Anyhow, what I need is a way to teleport between where we go on our field trip and my house, so there's no problem there.

“With this, I'll be able to keep looking after you, even when I'm on the field trip, Night. Even though it'll probably only be in the evening or for a short while...”

“Woof.”

Night paws at me as if to say *Don't worry about it!* He makes me feel all warm inside!

“That said...now that we have teleportation magic, it means we can go anywhere in the other world!”

It'll be awesome to be able to go home when we run out of time to explore and just teleport straight back to the same spot the next day. Directly there! I don't care if that's kind of spoiling the fun of the adventure! We don't have time to be traipsing back and forth every day.

“All right, now we have to finish exploring this forest! So let's go!”

“Woof!”

Night and I quickly prepare ourselves and step back into the woods.

“That’s right...I did say I’d clear out some of the monsters from around here for when I meet back up with Owen and the others.”

“Woof.”

I don’t know how much of an impact my efforts will have, but even if I just get rid of a few monsters, it should make the task of meeting back up with Owen a little easier.

I think I’ll be the one to make my way to the edge of the forest next month, but there’s still the possibility that Owen and the others might try to come to me...

Up until this point, we’ve always gone the opposite direction and farther into the forest. This is mainly because the monsters tend to be a little weaker nearer the outer rim of the woods. Farther in, there are monsters that can use magic. Around the outskirts, all you really see are things like Goblin Elites, Bloody Ogres, and Hell Slimes. All monsters we’ve seen a thousand times before.

That said, we must have knocked a ton of Goblin Elites into the dust, but it still doesn’t feel like there’s any fewer of them. Maybe it’s no use trying to get rid of them all by ourselves.

“Woof!”

“Hmm? What’s up, Night?”

Night lets out a sudden bark, so I turn to see what’s going on, but before I can act, Night is already darting off into the distance.

“Huh?! What happened?”

This is like the time we went into the cave and found the sage’s book... Maybe Night has found something again.

I chase after Night so that I’m not left behind, but suddenly, it becomes more difficult to sense his presence.

“Woof.”

“What? You want me to conceal my presence?”

“Woof!”

I don’t know why, but when Night barks like that, it feels like I’m supposed to follow him. A creature like Night knows far more about living in a forest than I ever will.

I quickly activate One with Nature, hold my breath, and follow Night.

As I do, I begin to hear noises from what sounds like a battle.

“Guh!”

On closer inspection, a girl dressed in ragged clothes is brawling with a band of Goblin Elites.

With each aggressive step this way or that, the girl’s silver low side-pony swishes, and her blue eyes move from one enemy to the next.

Scanning the area to see if anyone else is here, I realize that she’s all alone.

First Lexia, now her...

“W-we have to rescue her—!”

“Woof.”

I attempt to rush straight into action, when I feel a tug on the hem of my clothes. Night has them in his mouth and won’t let me go.

“Wh-what are you doing, Night? We have to go and—!”

“...”

I don’t know why, but Night just won’t let go.

But this girl is in danger... Wait. Something’s off.

...The girl is fighting with a whole group of Goblin Elites. I know that when I found Lexia, she was being attacked by goblins, too, but she never attempted to fight back.

Yet this girl...even though she’s being attacked on multiple fronts, she’s dodging all of them. She’s obviously no stranger to a fight.

Hmm... I still don’t see a sword or any kind of weapon equipped...

Did she come here empty-handed? What in the hell for?!

The more rationally I look at the situation unfolding in front of me, the more mysterious the girl becomes.

As I try and figure out what’s happening, the girl swings her right arm up with all her might.

“Hyah!”

“Graaah?!”

A Goblin Elite’s right arm comes flying off.

“Huh?!”

What is going on here?!

The Goblin Elites look as confused as I am. From behind, another Goblin Elite appears, obviously hoping to catch her off guard.

“Ah! No—!”

“Graaahhh!”

The girl tries to duck away, but the monster is too quick and launches an attack with its fist.

The girl seems to have surmised that she’s never going to be able to dodge and crosses her arms in front of her to block excessive damage. The blow lands hard, knocking her through the air and straight into a tree. She slumps into a heap at the bottom.

“We can’t just sit and watch, Night! We have to help her!”

“...Woof!”

Night looks worried and hesitates for a split second before following my order and running into the fray.

While I run straight over to the girl, Night runs toward the Goblin Elites to distract them.

“Woof!”

“Graaah?!”

Night launches a surprise attack on one of the Goblin Elites, ripping its head off with his sharp claws before the monster even has time to

react.

Thanks to Night's assault, none of the monsters notice me as I arrive at the girl's side.

"...Phew. Looks like you're only knocked out..."

As I pick her up, some of the Goblin Elites that Night has been toying with finally notice me.

"Grah?!"

"Graaahhh!!"

"Whoa...I need to think of a plan fast... Night! Is it okay if I leave a few of them to you?!"

"Woof!"

Night reassuringly nods at my request. I can always count on Night!

"Now I need to figure out what we're gonna do...!"

"Grah?!"

Carrying the girl in one arm, I need to get one of the weapons that the sage left me into the other...

The Divine Whip appears.

It is a very long snow-white whip. Apart from that, it doesn't look like anything special.

But when I try to use it—

"Hyah!"

"Graaah!! Gaaah?!"

—with a light flick of the wrist, it's like the whip comes alive! It shoots after one of the Goblin Elites. The goblin manages to avoid the initial attack, but the whip automatically changes course and gives chase, soon wrapping itself around the monster's arm.

Once tightly coiled around the Goblin Elite's limb, the tip of the whip turns black and, with a gentle tug, tears through the arm like a hot knife through butter.

After seeing their companion's arm get torn off, the other monsters momentarily pause. Not wanting to miss an opportunity, I crack the whip once, twice...

As I crack the whip more and more, the formerly single-tipped whip grows more and more ends, each of which automatically starts flying toward every single one of my targets.

Once all the whip ends find their marks, they begin to constrict and rip through body parts. They even slice through torsos.

I find myself extremely thankful for a weapon like this. It goes after my enemies as if it has a mind of its own with little more than a flick of the wrist, even in a place as dangerous as this forest. The sage sure had good taste in weapons...

Having managed to defeat all my monsters without issue, I look over to Night, who has just downed the last of his own opponents, too. I quickly recover the drop items scattered messily around the area and

turn my attention back to the unconscious girl under my arm.

“So...what do we about her? Maybe I should take her back to our place so she can get some rest...”

“Woof.”

Just like before, Night is pulling at the hem of my clothes with his teeth, gently shaking his head.

I can't understand what reason Night would have, but he seems really opposed to the idea of bringing the girl home with us... He must have a reason for acting this way, though.

Perhaps she's an enemy. In that case, it would be pretty reckless to bring her back to the house. Although I'm sure it would be frightening for her to wake up in a strange man's house as well.

After all is said and done, though, Night wasn't so opposed to her that he refused to help her, so she can't be *that* bad. At least, that's what I want to believe. What I really want to believe.

“Woof...WOOF!”

“Hmm? Should we at least head out of the forest?”

“Woof, woof!”

I follow Night's lead, and soon enough, we're out.

As soon as we get past the trees, the world is bright and sunny, and grass meadows stretch far into the distance. The grass here is only ankle-high, so there's no way any monsters can hide in it.

The first thing I do is lay the girl on the ground underneath a tree and wait for her to wake up. Once she opens her eyes, I can get her to drink an Herb of Complete Healing Juice. If she doesn't like citrus flavor, then that's too bad; she'll have to deal with it.

I feel relieved that we managed to make it out of the woods, but I still dwell on what I should do about the girl. If it's better that I don't take her back home, then I probably shouldn't even mention the house in the first place. I don't know why it has to be this way, but if Night is cautious, then there's no two ways about it.

This means I'll have to think of an explanation for her when she wakes up...but no good ideas are springing to mind... What should I do?

The closest one to the truth would be that I stumbled upon her fight with the Goblin Elites and saved her. I guess I don't have to go into any unnecessary details. It seems the most straightforward way, in any case, so I guess I'll go with that.

As I sloppily try to construct an explanation in my head, the girl's eyes flutter open.

“Ungh... Ahhh... Where...am...I...? Huh?!”

The girl has regained consciousness, but it looks like she took some heavy damage from the fight with the Goblin Elites, and she soon begins to grimace in pain.

“Are you okay?”

“Wha—! What?! Y-you’re...”

As soon as I ask her if she’s okay, she bolts upright, but her injuries seem to be pretty bad, because she can’t support herself for long.

“Look...just drink this. It’ll have the same effect as eating healing herbs...”

I take out some Herb of Complete Healing Juice in a plastic bottle and present it to her, but the girl simply stares back at me suspiciously.

“Wh-what the hell is that? ...And what’s inside it?”

I try to put her mind at ease by taking a swig myself to show her that it isn’t poisoned. It seems to do the trick, and she eventually takes a sip.

“Wha—? What’s happening...?”

The juice immediately takes effect, and the girl’s beaten and bloody body is mark-free in an instant. That’s the sage’s herbs for you.

“So what were you doing back there?” I ask after I see that her wounds have healed and she’s calmed down a little bit. She tenses up slightly and begins to speak.

“...I came here to train.”

“To train?!”

I can’t believe it! She came here for the same reason I did!

I know looks can be deceiving...but she didn’t have any equipment... Maybe fighting bare-handed is an aspect of her training or something?

“Woof...”

Night sighs for some reason. That’s weird. What’s the matter?

“Eh-hem! So...uh...why are you here in a place like this? I could have sworn I was battling some Goblin Elites...”

“Hmm? Oh, um...you see...uhhh...I was training, too! I came to this forest specifically to train!”

“Wh-what?!”

The girl seems shocked.

“I never thought I’d see anyone training out here in a million years...”

“What was that?”

“N-nothing! I was just saying that it looks like we came here for the same purpose.”

“Y-yeah, we did!”

““Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha!””

...That’s odd. We both laughed a fake laugh.

“So...can I ask you your name?”

“Huh? M-my name...? My name...”

The girl looks a little worried, and she’s hesitant to say.

“Oh, um...you don't have to tell me if you don't want to.”

“...No, it's all right. I'm Luna. That's it. There's nothing that comes before or after.”

“Wh-whaaat...?”

Are there even names with other names both before and after?

“Okay, well...I'm Yuuya Tenjou. This here is Night.”

“Woof!”

“So you have a family name? Does that mean you're a nobleman? And what's this? A black...dog?”

“No, I'm not...”

I say my given name first, as seems to be the custom in this world, but...I guess having a family name in and of itself here is unusual.

“Luna, I know you came here to train, same as I did, but...I want to know if you plan to continue training here.”

“...I suppose I'm going to have to. I can't go back home until I've finished my job.”

“What? But...aren't you in danger here? What if you get attacked by a band of Goblin Elites again...?”

I have no idea why Luna would come to train in such a dangerous place.

I don't have the right to tell her to stop, but...I'm worried for her, so I can't stop myself from asking.

“Yeah...I know that, but I can't just quit my... Oh!”

It looks like Luna agrees about the risk, but she also gasps as if she's just thought of something.

“Hey, Yuuya. Why don't you accompany me on my training for a while?”

“Huh?”

“For reasons I won't go into, I need to stick around in the Weald. I know you think it's dangerous, and that I should stop, but...if that's the case, then why don't we train together? It looks like *you're* at least powerful enough to stick up for yourself around here.”

“Sigh...”

“So? What do you say? Will you train with me?”

“Hmm...”

Objectively, I don't have a problem training together with Luna; it's just that I don't know how long I can train with her for... But then refusing her and having her train anyway in such a dangerous place makes me even more worried.

“Okay, I'll train with you for a while.”

“You will?! I'm so grateful!”

“However! There will be days when I can't train with you, so I apologize in advance for that. And I can't train with you today, so you'll have to go home, I'm afraid. If those conditions are okay with

you, then let's help each other out."

"Hmm...I have no problem with you not being able to train some days. It's not like I'm going to be here the whole time, either. But you're making me go home today already...?!"

"Of course I am. I know you're all healed now, but you took some heavy damage back there. You should get some rest."

Luna doesn't seem entirely satisfied with my deal, but in the end, she puffs out her cheeks in defeat and agrees.

"Fine. I'll do what you recommend."

"Thank you."

"But! You must train with me tomorrow. Got that?"

"Fine."

When I agree, Luna nods as if she's finally satisfied.

"Okay... Then we train together. There's no need to be overly polite with me, by the way. Just call me Luna."

"Oh? Then...nice to meet you again, Luna."

"Same here!"

And so Luna and I become training buddies.

As I reflect on the funny little situation I've found myself in, I notice Luna staring at her body as if something is bothering her.

"What's wrong?"

"Huh? Oh...it's just that I've gotten quite dirty, and I'm covered in sweat...probably from running from those Goblin Elites after they ambushed me earlier..."

As she speaks, Luna sniffs herself and looks over her body again. She frowns.

"...This won't do at all. I can't go back to town like this. I hope there's a river or something nearby..."

"In that case...would you like to take a bath?"

"Huh?"

Luna tilts her head quizzically at my proposal.

"A bath...? You mean *those* baths?"

"I don't know what kind of baths you're alluding to, but I'm carrying a set of baths with me right now. I just thought that since you need one, I might as well offer."

"You have a set of baths?!"

Luna's eyes spring wide open. I guess that reaction isn't totally unexpected. I mean, I *do* have portable baths on me, after all.

Night and I usually use the baths to relax, but in times like these, I appreciate their convenience even more.

"Yuuya...I don't mean to doubt you, but how am I supposed to believe that you have a bath on hand? And apart from that, baths are luxuries. Only noblemen are rich enough to afford them. Plus, we're all the way out here...in the Weald..."

“Well...you see...the baths are something I acquired as a drop item from a monster. A Crystal Deer, I think it was... And it has a feature that makes you and the bath invisible to other people in the same area, so you don’t have to worry about monsters or people spotting you. Night and I will keep watch anyway.”

“A C-Crystal Deer, you say?”

Luna looks even more shocked than before. She thinks for a moment before quietly nodding.

“If you insist, then I’ll accept your offer.”

“Great! I’ll get them ready, then.”

Once I set up the bath, Luna’s jaw drops. It looks like we have a budding bathing fan.

“So...this is a bath...?”

I—Luna—stand there stunned, looking at the enormous bath before me. It’s filled to the top with hot water and is emitting a strange aura.

According to Yuuya, the weird boy I met in the Weald, this is a hinoki wood bath...

“So he was telling the truth, then... He was carrying a bath around with him.”

Normally, if you hear that someone has a bath with them, you dismiss it as a brazen lie.

Especially if they’re obviously not filthy rich enough to be able to afford the luxury.

I can’t believe he carries this thing around with him. Nor can I believe that I’m about to experience one for the first time...

It even has this strange feature that makes it invisible. This is absurd...

Despite that, Yuuya and Night have offered to stand guard for me just in case.

After I slip out of my clothes, I dip my toe in the warm water before immersing my entire body.

“Huh?”

At that very moment, I feel a tingling sensation.

Wh-what’s up with this water? I’ve only just got in and my body already feels completely refreshed...

And the strangeness doesn’t end there.

Usually, when you wash yourself with water, the dirt doesn’t just slough straight off. You need to use a washcloth or something. But this water...has polished my entire body in a matter of seconds. I already feel squeaky clean.

Confused at the oddness of it all, I settle deeper into the bathwater with trepidation.

And then—

“Ahhhh...”

—all it takes is a second in the tub to fall under its spell.

“Luna! It’s over there!”

“Night! I’m leaving it to you!”

“Woof!”

A few days have passed since I agreed to begin training together with Luna.

I have to admit that things were a little awkward at first, but it’s going much better now, even with Night.

Today, we’re surrounded by some Goblin Elites, like the ones that ambushed her last time.

“Graaaaah!”

“Woof!”

“Gagh?!”

Night launches a sneak attack against the Goblin Elite that’s attempting to attack Luna. The goblin has to give up its attack on her if it wants to defend itself from Night.

Luna doesn’t let an opportunity pass her by.

“Now!”

“Gra-graaaah!!”

Luna waves her hands wide, and the Goblin Elite splits into bloody chunks as if chopped to pieces by some invisible blade.

At first, I thought Luna was fighting empty-handed, but now that I’ve gotten a closer look, she actually uses special threads. These threads are pretty sturdy and can’t even be snapped by the strength of the Goblin Elites. In fact, the more a monster attempts to tear through the thread, the deeper the threads cut, until they eventually slice right through its body.

I’m used to battling the Goblin Elites by now, so I’m mainly acting as backup together with Night.

“Take this!! Vortex!!”

Luna slams both hands to the ground, gathering all the threads that litter the battlefield into one. Spinning them like a drill, she launches them at the Goblin Elite, piercing straight through it.

As soon as the threads pierce through, they retract from the Goblin Elite’s body, leaving it riddled with holes.

Whoa...

As I reel from the sheer brutality of the attack, Luna and Night clean up the rest of the horde.

“You’ve really learned how to put those Goblin Elites down, huh?”

“...I’m not so sure. I think it’s still quite dangerous for me if you and Night aren’t here backing me up. And that’s just one-on-one.”

From my perspective, Luna already looks more than strong enough

to take care of a few Goblin Elites, but I guess she still doesn't feel confident.

Unfortunately, we'll have to leave more training for another day. We're out of time...I think.

"Luna...I'm sorry, but starting the day after tomorrow, I need to take a break from training for a while."

"Why?"

It's because I have the school field trip coming up. While I'll have enough time to pop back to this world to take care of Night, I definitely won't have the time to train.

Still, I can't say that to Luna. She won't understand. I'm sorry, but I'll just have to dodge the question...

"Uh...personal reasons. Sorry."

"...It's all right. Don't worry about it. But if we have to stop for a while in two days' time, does that mean we can still train tomorrow? In that case, I want to work even harder than today."

"Ha-ha-ha. Go easy on me!"

I laugh awkwardly as Luna teases me.

At first, she was super cautious around me, but lately she shows lots more emotion, as if she's truly opened her heart to us. It makes me really happy.

It may have only been a few days, but after we risked our lives and fought together, it feels more like we're close friends than just training buddies. A lot of things have happened, but I'm so glad I met her. I hope she feels the same about me.

And after fighting so many monsters, she's definitely improved.

"Hmm...let's finish up here."

"Huh? Have you had enough already?"

"Yeah. Plus, I want to take a bath."

"Fine, fine..."

Ever since she tried my bath on the day we first met, she's been hooked. Now every time we finish training, she insists on taking one before she goes home. And after I brought some shampoo and conditioner with me from Earth, she's been spending even more time in there.

I've always thought she's a pretty girl, but since she started making a habit of bathing, she's become even more gorgeous.

As Night and I turn to go and stand sentry like always, Luna grabs my hand.

"What's the matter?"

"You can go first today, Yuuya."

"I can? Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I just feel like going in after you today."

"R-really? If you insist."

I'm thrown off guard. Luna always goes in first. But I nod anyway and begin to prepare for my bath.

"Ahhh...this feels so good."

"Woof..."

Night barks next to me as though enjoying himself.

I love baths so much... They wash away all the weariness of the day.

I'm slowly relaxing, letting my worries drift gradually away, when...

"Huh? ...HUH?! L-Luna?!"

"..."

Sensing someone's presence, I look up to see Luna, who is supposed to be waiting outside, wrapped in a towel and making her way into the tub.

I'm too confused to say anything as Luna silently edges closer to me and embraces me... Wait! She's hugging me?!

In that moment, my whole body freezes up.

Errr...ummm...what do I do?! What's the right course of action here?

Did she want to get in the bath before me after all? But then why would she be hugging me...? What the hell is going on?!

I'm too confused for rational thought when Luna murmurs something.

"...Thank you."

"Huh?"

"I really appreciate you helping me like this. Thanks to you, I've gotten a little stronger."

"Th-that's not true. You were always strong, Luna. And besides, training was something I wanted to do, too, so you don't have to say thank you."

I've known ever since she first got attacked by the Goblin Elites that she is very skilled. And ever since we've been training together, I've noticed her movements getting better from all the leveling up she's probably been doing.

Besides, Night and I needed to train, too, and this whole partnership led to us getting to spend more time with Luna. It's I who should be grateful.

Still clinging to me, Luna gently shakes her head.

"...No. You saved me. And I don't just mean from the Goblin Elites... I can finally see the light in this world. The time we've spent together has been so precious to me. Thank you... Thank you so much."

"But...what do you mean...?"

As I rack my brain about what Luna could really be getting at, she jumps up.

“The hot water must be getting to me. I’m obviously not in my right mind.”

“Hmm? O-oh, right— Gah!”

“Huh? What’s the problem?”

As my gaze shoots to Luna, alerted by the sound of the splash she makes getting up, I see the towel fall from the contours of her body—dislodged by her action—and unveil her naked form.

In that moment, all the nerves in my leveled-up body are suddenly firing, water I must have inhaled spurts out of my nose, and I turn my face away in a flash. Luna is staring at me strangely, attempting to read my face as though unable to comprehend my reaction.

“What in the world are you so worked up about? Why did you look away after all that water spurted out of your nose...?”

“Y-your towel! It’s fallen off!”

“What...? Ack!”

It looks like Luna has finally noticed. She immediately squats down and desperately tries to retrieve the towel from the water in a futile bid to preserve what’s left of her modesty.

I still feel far too awkward and embarrassed to look back in Luna’s direction. A pink tinge is creeping up her cheeks as she directs a weak glare my way.

“...Did you see anything?”

“.....I’m sorry.”

It takes me a long time to consider how I should answer, but in the end, I decide on the truth.

Luna’s face flushes an even deeper shade of crimson, but she says nothing more.

—An awkward silence descends, neither of us comfortable enough to utter a single word, until it is suddenly broken by the happy bark of an oblivious Night.

“Woof!”



CHAPTER 6

The Field Trip

The training sessions with Luna have ended, and the day of the field trip has finally arrived.

I've never felt the anticipation of going on a field trip before, and I've been so excited that I couldn't sleep a wink last night.

But for a body as honed and leveled-up as mine, it's not really an issue, and I was still able to wake up perfectly fine this morning. It sure is nice to have such a cooperative body sometimes...

In any case, I pack up the things I need, say a proper goodbye to Night, and head out the door with a spring in my step.

“—Yay! I win!”

“Goddammit!”

On the bus to the camp, the other students and I pass the time playing games. I may not have brought any playing cards of my own, but Akira and Rin have brought plenty of other games and snacks to keep us entertained on the journey.

I do feel bad that I didn't bring anything, though...

“Oh, come on! Why can't I win anything?! Why am *I* always left with the joker?”

“You need to be more poker-faced!”

“Akira, that joker seems to have taken a liking to you!”

“Please don't say it like that!”

We're playing a game called old maid, and Akira is on one hell of a losing streak.

“Is there anything you can't do, Yuuya? You've won again...!”

“It's just beginner's luck! Believe me, each and every time has been a fluke!”

I've yet to draw a joker for some reason, and I always seem to get just the cards I need. The games are over pretty quickly.

...This is just a guess, but I think my luck stat might have something to do with it.

Every time I take another card, I just get this feeling...

This card...no, wait. I don't know why, but something's telling me not to take it. This one feels luckier...

My intuition has been through the roof, but...it's not very fun to win all the time. If my luck stat is influencing things, then I wonder if I'll ever be able to enjoy playing games again. I know I should be happy that I'm so lucky, but somehow, I'm not.

It almost feels as if I'm cheating, but I guess any game that's determined by luck is going to end the same way.

As I lament the downsides of being too lucky, I can't help but think back to the fire at the department store.

Kaede and the others may be laughing and joking with us now, but it was really touch and go back then... I shudder to think what would have happened if I hadn't acquired my new skills from the other world. I'm so glad I was able to save them.

The bus continues toward camp, all of us blissfully unaware of what's about to happen next.

"Whoa..."

We've arrived at some place that looks almost like a mountaintop inn. Is this where we're going to camp?

All around me, the teachers of each class are gathering their students.

"Over here, everyone! I'm going to explain the activities for today. Split up into your groups!"

Following our teacher's instructions, we sit down in our groups. Ms. Sawada scans her students and smirks.

"All right, let's get down to it. This trip...is all about survival."

""Huh?!""

The entire class is momentarily stunned. Then a deluge of questions breaks out.

"Wh-what do you mean by 'survival'? There's an inn right here. Can't we just sleep in there...?"

"I don't know where you got that idea from! This inn is for teachers only!"

"Th-then what are we supposed to do?"

"You're sleeping outside."

"You've gotta be kidding!"

The rest of us students are stunned silent. A-are we really supposed to survive on our own out here?!

"If you recall, I did say back in class that this field trip would be a training exercise for all you kids already on the fast track to success. Let me fill you in a little more. We're going to hand out the bare essentials, and then you guys are going to survive for two days and

one night out here in the mountains. If you want to bathe, there's a hot spring somewhere in the area. If you can find it, you can use it. See, not all bad, is it?"

““““Whaaat?!””””

The whole class raises their voices in protest at this turn of events.

I remember Ms. Sawada saying that it would be like a camp, but I didn't expect to be sleeping *outside*... I know she says we'll have the bare essentials, but...

It looks like many other students have the same concerns as me, and another round of questions commences.

"Ms. Sawada! What are we going to do about food...?"

"You're going to find your own food. There are plenty of wild mushrooms and herbs growing around here, so you can forage for those."

““““Seriously?!””””

They're leaving us responsible for finding our own food, too?! Isn't that dangerous? I mean, mushrooms alone...

"We'll give you a minimal amount of rice to take with you, but if you don't want to go hungry, I'd suggest finding other food sources."

"Maybe it's safer just to go hungry, then, if that's the case..."

I have to agree. The teacher's expression sharpens.

"This is but one challenge. And part of a broader class competition."

"A class competition?"

The plot thickens.

"As you all—with the possible exception of Tenjou—know, our academy's fall festival is super popular. Now, each class is going to be running a stall at the festival this year, and you'll all receive a certain amount of budget to do so...which is going to be determined by the results of this competition of ours. If you do well...you'll get a chance to one-up the other classes and do something special."

Oh, so that's how it works, huh...? Maybe I'm crazy, but that sounds pretty fun to me.

We never had anything like that at my old school, and I don't think any others organize their festivals this way, either.

"Pluuus, if you win, you'll also earn me a tidy little bonus! So do your best, okay?!"

““““So that's what this is really all about!””””

The whole class shoots back the same accusation.

Wow, a lot sure is riding on this, huh?

"I-isn't mushroom picking dangerous if you don't know what you're doing? And apart from fungi and wild plants, what else is even out there...? I don't understand how this is supposed to be a competition."

"There's a river, so you can fish, too. Regarding the mushrooms, bring anything you pick to us teachers first. We'll tell you if it's edible

or not. That's also how we'll work out the class scores. The class with the most students who manage to both successfully forage safe ingredients and cook something edible with them will be declared the winner. We'll only score you once, though, so you can't go back and gather any more ingredients once you've already come to see us. Just remember, if you forget to show the teachers what you've picked before you cook it, DO. NOT. EAT. IT. If you die, it's not my fault."

You're making me a little nervous now, Ms. Sawada. Although your threats do seem to be effective. I don't think anyone will be eating anything without showing the teachers first. Especially if they know they won't get any points for it.

"In the worst-case scenario that you do end up poisoning yourselves, seek out Ms. Yomikawa. She's in charge of first aid. She'll fix you right up... I'm not sure how well, though."

At that moment, a woman in a ghostly white uniform appears. She has beautiful black hair, but it's long and falls forward over her face. A single left eye peers out at the class from behind the dark curtain.

"Heh-heh-heh... Oh, don't you worry now, children. With one drop of this medicine...heh-heh-heh..."

She's not exactly putting me at ease. Her medicine is bright purple! Everyone knows that purple equals poison!

I know a person's name doesn't necessarily determine their personality, but having a name like Yomikawa is pretty ominous—*yomi* means "hell"! Thinking back, this is probably the first time I've seen the school nurse in person... She's certainly...unique. I think all the teachers here have their quirks, but they are great at teaching, and their lessons are interesting, so it's okay, I guess.

Seeing that I'm deep in thought, Kaede tells me more about the school nurse, her voice trembling the whole time.

"Y-you might not have seen it yet, Yuuya, b-but Ms. Yomikawa's infirmary is always shrouded in darkness. And if you ever pass the door, y-you can hear screaming coming from inside... No one ever goes near it unless they have to... I-it's why the school has such a good attendance record..."

"That's an innovative way to run an infirmary, I suppose."

It's quite ingenious, really. Since they're all too scared to visit the nurse, the students take their lessons seriously and are doubly careful not to become sick or injured. That sounds like a good thing to me. I'm not so sure about the screaming, though.

As if to back up Kaede's rumors, all the students have a renewed look of resolve that they will absolutely show the teachers what they've gathered before they eat it. It looks like everyone will be all right.

"Now, any questions? We'll hand you all an illustrated guide to

edible plants, so remember, work hard and if you find yourself struggling, just think about me and my bonus. And about the school festival as well, I guess.”

““““As well?””””

At least she’s up-front about it. But like she said, if we can get the most points on this field trip, we can do something cool at the school festival, so we should try our best.

After the teachers hand out what truly are the bare essentials, we regroup.

“All right...so what do we do?”

“There’s no need to worry! You have me, the prince of fishing, mushroom hunting, herb picking—”

“Setting this dingus aside, I think it would be best to assign jobs.”

“Who will do what?”

When I ask Rin to elaborate, she takes out the illustrated plant guide and the fishing rod in response.

“Yuuya and Kaede, you’re in charge of fishing. This idiot and I, meanwhile, will go looking for mushrooms and other edible plants. That should make things more efficient, right?”

“Yeah, I guess... I don’t really care which job you give me either way, though.”

“Fishing, huh...? I’ve never done it before, so I’m a little nervous.”

“Neither have I, but I’m sure that we’ll manage somehow. Let’s just give it our all!”

““““Yeah!””””

“Uh, excuse me...? Hey! Are you ignoring me? How rude!”

Leaving Akira behind, we decide on what we’re going to do next and get to work putting up the tent as the first task.

“Right, so we’ve found water...”

“But what do we do now?”

Kaede and I have reached the river, but now we have no idea what to do next.

As the land we’re on is owned by the school, the way to the river is clearly marked on the map, and we’ve arrived at what seems to be a giant campsite.

I look down at the fishing rod in my hand and set off to find a good spot, but...

“...It’s really crowded.”

“...Yeah, it is.”

It looks like everyone has made their way down here as their first stop, so it might be quite difficult to actually catch something now. I’m no expert, but I don’t think it’s a good idea for the fishing lines to get tangled up...

As I look around at everyone else, Kaede asks me a question.

“What should we do? At this rate, it doesn’t look like we’ll be able to catch anything anytime soon. Should we go and help Rin and Akira instead?”

“Maybe...”

Without even thinking about it, I’ve automatically activated my Detect Presence skill and begun to look for a location with less people around.

“Hmm?”

As I scan the area, I can sense not just the people, but the fish, too, it seems. There are, of course, some fish where everyone else is fishing, but it looks like they’re mostly concentrated in other areas.

I look over to where I sense the majority gathered and find that they’re largely hiding out in the shallows. Those places aren’t exactly the best for fishing.

Hmm...there are plenty of fish there, but it’s going to be hard to catch anything...

...Hey. Wait.

Can’t I just catch them with my hands?

After the idea pops into my head, I feel like I’ve just gotta try it.

“There’s something I want to try, so can we meet up with Rin and Akira later?”

“Huh? I’m fine with that, but what are you gonna do?”

“Just watch.”

I roll up the bottoms of my pants and wade into the river.

“Y-Yuuya?! What are you doing?”

Kaede’s shriek of surprise is pretty loud, and before long, some of the other students are looking this way.

...Whoa, I didn’t think this many people would be watching... Oh well. I just need to keep concentrating on the fish.

I turn my attention to the creatures swimming all around me.

Hmm, I think this just might work.

If I factor in the resistance of the water and picture the movements of S-class monsters, I think I’ve got this. Once I get a read on those, it’s just a question of translating that to action. Shouldn’t be too difficult.

All eyes seem to be on me after Kaede’s outburst. When I enter the water, even the fish seem on edge, so I activate my One with Nature skill.

Normally, once a target spots me, then this skill has no effect, but this is Earth. The animals here aren’t as perceptive as monsters. They’re built differently. They’re less cautious. Although it feels like more than caution... Maybe the monsters in the other world also have some kind of sixth sense?

As soon as I activate One with Nature, Kaede, who had just been

looking at me, yells out in surprise again.

“H-huh?! Yuuya?! Where’d you go?!”

“He d-disappeared?!”

“Where is he?”

It’s not just Kaede. The rest of the students are stunned by my disappearing act, too. The fish also seem spooked. But after the shock of my initial disappearance, they can no longer sense my presence and begin to calm down.

Not wanting to miss my chance, I set my sights on a victim.

“—Hyah!”

I thrust my right hand into the water and smoothly grab one of the fish that had been leisurely swimming in that spot right around the neck. It’s over so fast. Within a moment of sliding my arm back out of the water, the surface is already still and calm.

I look at the fish in my hand and nod.

“Hmm, looks like it worked.”

““““Whoooooo!!””””

“Whoa!” I cry out, startled by the sudden cheer erupting all around me. Turning my attention to the source of the noise, I notice the students who had been watching me before staring at me and whooping.

“Holy crap! Did you see that?! He caught that fish with his bare hands!”

“Wow, I can see that he caught something, but I didn’t even catch his hands going into the water.”

“I couldn’t see him at all until just a few seconds ago...”

“Yeah, he just vanished, and by the time I found him again, he was just standing there, fish in hand...”

“Whatever the case, it was superhuman... How could he pull a stunt like that off?”

I can feel a cold sweat forming as I’m confronted with a greater reaction than I’d anticipated.

Were my movements really so unnatural? I know I caught the fish pretty quick, but... Maybe it’s less about how I caught the fish and more about how I made myself disappear that they’re so interested in.

As I ponder their reaction, an excited Kaede runs over to me.

“Damn, Yuuya! I had no idea you could catch a fish like that...!”

“Oh, yeah, ha-ha-ha-ha... I had a hunch it might work, so I just went for it, and here we are.”

“...I remember you being quick in gym class, too. You sure are a high-spec specimen, aren’t you?”

“I—I am?”

After what happened in gym class back then, I guess it doesn’t take a detective to realize that I’m pretty physically adept.

“Anyway, changing the subject, it looks like we can catch a ton of fish this way, so let’s grab a few. I’ll put them in the bucket when I’ve caught them, so can you keep an eye on them?”

“Sure thing!”

With that settled, I turn back toward the river to catch more fish.

And by the way, I’ve already checked out the fish with my Appraise skill, and they’re definitely okay to eat!

...Once we regroup with Rin and Akira, maybe I should use my Appraise skill on everything we’ve gathered before we submit it for scoring. Then at least we’ll know it’s safe.

While I’m thinking about what’s coming next, many of the other students have filtered down to the shallows of the river to try my fishing technique out themselves. They’re struggling, though.

Despite that, I manage to catch another couple of fish, and by the time I’m done, I have a bucket of four.

“Welcome back! How did it go?”

Heading back to the camping area, we’re greeted cheerfully by Rin and Akira, who is flat on the ground with his ass in the air... I can only imagine how he ended up like that.

“We managed to catch some.”

“Listen up, Rin! Yuuya is something else! He caught these four fish with his bare hands! Everyone’s talking about it!”

“With his hands?! *Sigh*... It’s the same as that time in gym class; he’s more athletic than he looks.”

“...?”

When I was fat, I never seemed to enjoy exercise, no matter how hard I was trying in gym. I don’t know how athletic I look now, though.

“What happened to Akira, by the way?”

“Huh? Oh, him... Just leave him be.”

“Hey! This is all because you’ve been so busy bossing me around.”

“Oh. It’s alive.”

Forcing himself back up, Akira looks very dizzy as he begins to explain what happened to him.

“...Everything was going so well at first. We weren’t totally sure what we were doing, but we still managed to forage some mushrooms and some wild plants. Then guess what happened. Before long, she was forcing me up on steep cliff edges to pick the plants up there, she made me test unfamiliar mushrooms for poison... She even used me as bear bait!”

“You tested mushrooms for poison?! The teacher said that’s dangerous! And bears?! There are bears around here?! What kind of hellscape is this?!”

This battle for survival is even more intense than I thought it'd be! Akira looks at my shocked expression and flashes me a weak smile followed by a thumbs-up.

"D-don't worry about me. As long as I can see smiles on all of your faces...then it's no big deal."

"I'd say it's a pretty big deal!"

Especially the stuff about the bear! What the hell are we supposed to do about a giant, man-eating predator?

I quickly scan Akira's body with my Appraise skill, but I can't detect any poison, so it looks like he's had a lucky escape for now. I'm so relieved...

"It sounds like you've had quite the adventure. Can we check out what you foraged together?"

"Sure. Be my guest."

When Rin gives me the go-ahead, I use my Appraise skill on the mushrooms and plants that she and Akira have gathered.

Black Truffle

A truffle?! There are truffles around here?! On *our* mountain?! What is with this school?!

This is the jackpot, and there's still so much left to check over!

Wild Yam

A wild yam! Whoa! A real wild yam! I know that a few places can farm them, but we found this in the wild!

Maitake Mushroom

I've never seen this mushroom before. It looks like your average maitake mushroom, but the mushroom caps are much bigger. They're edible, so no problems there.

I continue to scan through the gathered items and, as suspected, there are some poisonous items in there.

...Phew! It's a good thing I checked. If Akira had taste-tested any more of this stuff, he'd be a goner. How incredibly dangerous! Even though the teachers are supposed to check anyway.

Now for the next problem. How do we even prepare any of this stuff?

"Hey, can any of you guys cook?"

"""" ... """"

"Are you kidding me?"

All three of my teammates look away awkwardly as soon as I ask. It looks like I'm the only one here with any cooking skills. Come on,

now...

I have things I'd like to say, but first, we'd better take this stuff over to the teachers to check.

A few people are already gathered in the area where the teachers are waiting, and I spot Kaori among them.

"Kaori!"

"Hmm? Oh! Yuuya! How is your team doing?"

"Uhhh...okay, I guess...? Let's just say that if this wasn't an actual survival situation, I'd be enjoying myself a lot more."

I decide to come clean a bit to Kaori, and I shoot her a strained smile.

"I think I understand. Are you having fun, though?"

"...Yeah. I am."

I'm a little worried, but I'm having a good time. Honest!

After a brief moment, it looks like Kaori's team have finished up with the teachers, and they call Kaori over.

"We're done, Kaori...! Hey! Is that Tenjou?"

"Okay, I'm coming... See you later, Yuuya..."

Kaori turns back toward her teammates, who are staring at me in shock for some reason, and merrily skips over to rejoin them.

"Y-Yuuya... Are you friends with Kaori?!"

"Huh? K-Kaori...? Well, yeah... She's the reason I was able to transfer to this school in the first place."

That's right...Akira wasn't with us when we hung out at the department store last time. I guess he doesn't know.

There's no reason for me to hide our friendship, so I tell Akira straight. Once I do, Akira leans in closer, his theatrics in full swing.

"I'm so jealous! So, so jealous of you, Yuuya! You're friends with Princess Kaori...!"

"P-princess?"

As Rin approaches with a familiar look of exasperation on her face, I'm still not sure what Akira is talking about.

"Ignore this doofus for a moment. Kaori is the daughter of the principal. She always looks super polished, and she's really kind, so people call her princess."

"Oh..."

I suppose she does give off an air of nobility... Yet she's still so friendly and easy to talk to... I forget how amazing she is.

With Kaori on my mind, I go with my team over to the teachers to have our foraged food inspected.

"—Perfect! You're the first team that has brought this much to show us. And the first team not to bring us anything poisonous."

Once Ms. Sawada has given our plants and mushrooms the once-

over, she draws the same conclusion I did.

Maybe it was cheating... Maybe it was a little inappropriate to use my Appraise skill, but it's better than getting sick, so they'll have to give me a pass this time.

"The other teams were a little hit-and-miss, but you guys...oh-ho-ho...you guys are my ticket to that bonus. Heh-heh-heh..."

"Ah-ha...ha..."

All we can do is laugh along awkwardly with Ms. Sawada's sinister cackle.

"But don't get complacent, okay? We're going to score you on your cooking as well, so which one of you will be handling that?"

All hands point to me.

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

Ms. Sawada looks troubled at first but eventually puts her hands down on my shoulders.

"You can do it, Tenjou. The fate of my bonus rests with you now..."

"Could you at least try to hide your greed a little bit...?!"

Isn't all this supposed to be about us being able to do something big for the school festival?!

Paying my annoyed expression no mind, Ms. Sawada moves on to the next team.

"Sigh... There are so, so many things I would like to say to her, but should we just get on with the cooking?"

"Leave all the grunt work to me!"

"I—I can set the table!"

"I'll gladly sit back and relax on your behalf."

"Could you at least help out with the odd tasks, Rin?"

Letting out another sigh, I look over the seasonings and tools at my disposal.

It's just as Ms. Sawada said earlier. We have a small amount of rice we can use, but everything else we need to cook with is here, so I'll be able to make *something*, at least.

I look down at my ingredients and think.

Fried masu salmon and char...

Rapeseed flowers and wild yam dressed in black truffle...

Maitake mushroom soup...

It looks like I'll be preparing those dishes with a side of rice.

Now that I've decided on the menu, I head over to the cooking area so that I can begin to whip up my feast.

I'm not really sure what to do with the black truffle and wild yam, but I guess I'll just grate them and then add them in.

I'm going to fry up my masu salmon and char, then reuse the bones to make a stock for my soup. Getting to work, it's not long before I start to sense some stares. I turn around, assuming I'll catch Kaede peeking, but it's not just her. Lots of people have gathered nearby, their jaws hanging open in surprise.

"Yes? Is something the matter?"

"Oh, n-nothing...I was just thinking that you're very skilled..."

"Really? I'm not doing anything special..."

I intended to make the kind of food I normally would, but I guess I must have activated my Cooking skill or something.

Opting to ignore the dumbfounded looks on everyone's faces as I work, I push on.

The meal prep turned out to be a simpler job than I first thought. Still, I wasn't handling any ingredients from the other world, so it didn't take a lot of effort. It just felt like everyday cooking.

I taste-test a bit of the food. It's fine. Maybe it stands out more in the other world because of the quality of the incredible ingredients there.

"Okay, all done."

"""".....""""

When I serve the food, everyone stares in stunned silence. A silence that still hasn't lifted by the time Ms. Sawada and the other teachers come to grade my food.

Upon closer observation, Ms. Sawada seems to be in high spirits and faintly smells of alco— Hold up! Is she drunk?! We're in the middle of a field trip!

"Ahhh, nothing beats boozing in the mountains... Oh! And what do we have here?"

Ms. Sawada's eyes widen in surprise at the sight of my cooking. Her outburst has caught the other teachers' attention, and as soon as they catch a glimpse of my food, they all follow suit.

"Hey, Tenjou! Did you make this?!"

"Y-yes. I did..."

"...Can I taste a bit?"

"Sure. I have some ready to try."

The portion sizes aren't very big, but I've prepared some small plates for the teachers to try, so I have Ms. Sawada sample one of those.

And the result is...

"....."

"S-so how is it...?" I ask anxiously. Our teacher doesn't react.

"Y-Yuuya! Can I try some, too?"

"Hmm? Oh, sure..."

The moment I give Kaede the go-ahead, she gobbles a whole portion down in one bite as if she had been waiting an eternity.

“.....”

“Can somebody just say something already?”

I don’t know why, but the same thing that happened to the teacher happens to Kaede. As soon as she takes a bite, it’s like she freezes in time.

What if it tastes so bad that they don’t know what to say?

I thought it tasted all right, myself, but...maybe I just have terrible taste buds.

Still waiting for any kind of reaction, my mind gives in to more and more self-critical thoughts by the second—

““Deeelicious!””

“Huh?”

Everyone starts commenting at once. As the volume in the room suddenly increases, Kaede approaches me excitedly.

“What is this, Yuuya? It’s absolutely divine!”

“I-it is? I’m glad that yo—”

“‘Delicious’ doesn’t do it justice!”

“Huh?”

It’s surprising to hear a woman as languid as Ms. Sawada suddenly speaking so earnestly.

“We teachers get reduced lunches at the academy prepared by top chefs. So for us to get this excited...what on Earth are you hiding?!”

“Er, well...”

“Don’t worry! Your cooking is too good for me to care.”

It’s not just Ms. Sawada—all the other teachers are now telling me how much they love my dishes.

...Well, this is new.

Up until this point, I’ve only ever made food for myself. I was the only one eating it, so I never cared about the taste, but...having all these people praising my cooking is making me very happy.

I’ve had to cook for myself for a long time, but I bet it’s that Cooking skill of mine that’s taken it to the next level.

The other students are watching the teachers enjoy their meal, salivating at the thought of eating it themselves.

“Th-that looks damn tasty...”

“It’s strange...our meal looks so modest. How did he manage to prepare something like *that*...?!”

“Let me get this straight. He’s good at sports, he’s super handsome, and he can cook... Doesn’t that seem a little unfair to you?”

Hmm, with all these people looking longingly at my food, it makes me want to make something for everyone, but I don’t have the ingredients or the time...

Feeling slightly self-conscious, I grab a bite for myself.

When everyone has finished eating, Ms. Sawada is rubbing her belly with a look of satisfaction on her face.

“Ahhh...that hit the spot.”

“I’m glad you enjoyed it.”

I feel content that my food has satisfied so many people. It means it was worth taking the time to make it.

“...Hey, Yuuya.”

“Yes?”

“Will you marry me?”

“What?!”

“M-Ms. Sawada?!”

It’s not just me who’s taken aback by my teacher’s sudden proposal.

“Sigh, I know, I know. I’m untidy, I can’t cook, I can’t do laundry... All I did when I was at school was mess around and study. Thanks to that, I don’t have any romantic experience. I guess I’m not really top of anyone’s list, huh?”

“Uh, what...?!”

“Look, Tenjou. You are a prime piece of real estate. I’ve never eaten food this delicious in my life. And now that it’s come to this, I can’t overlook this opportunity! So marry me!”

“Get ahold of yourself, Ms. Sawada!”

I don’t have to reject her. The other teachers are already doing it for me.

“How much have you had to drink, Ms. Sawada? I think you’ve had enough.”

“Leave me alone! We’re in the mountains! I can drink if I wanna! Besides, we’re celebrating. A toast! To Tenjou and me!”

“Get it together! You’re a teacher! You can’t go around preying on the students!”

“We understand that you may be feeling, uh...sensitive about your age, never having had a boyfriend and all, but please try and act like a grown-up here!”

“You and Tenjou?! You’re being a little optimistic about your chances there, aren’t you?”

“Tsk...if you keep piling it on like that, this idiot teacher is gonna cry.”

I can already see tears sparkling in the corners of Ms. Sawada’s eyes... I feel so sorry for her.

No matter how you look at it, Ms. Sawada is drunk; this must be the booze talking.

“M-Ms. Sawada! Not Yuuya! Because...well, you know why. It’s wrong!”

Every time Kaede says “Not Yuuya,” I feel another blade in my

heart. She's saying that because of the predatory relationship dynamic, right? Not just because it's *me*, right?!

Soothing my unexpectedly aching heart, I notice that Ms. Sawada still doesn't seem perturbed.

"Is it too hard to give me an answer right away?! No matter! I'll wait for you! I won't let you slip through my fingers!"

"Stop it right now, Ms. Sawada!"

"Someone like you will just end up ruining a boy like him!"

"It's true!"

"...Do you actually *want* me to start crying?"

Ms. Sawada's eyes begin to glisten with tears once more at the sting of all the hurtful comments hurled her way.

"Look...you've kind of put me on the spot here. You have to remember, we're student and teacher—and you should know that I think you're one hell of a teacher—but...people don't need to keep making such rude comments..."

Yeah...coming on to students is a little sketchy, but she really is a good teacher normally. Although I can't speak to how she acts behind closed doors.

"Awww, Tenjou. You're the best! You know just how to make your teacher super happy!"

"Oomph—?!"

In fact, Ms. Sawada is so happy that she suddenly throws her arms around me. I-it's putting my face smack-dab in the valley between her boobs!

"What the—?! Ms. Sawada!! Release Tenjou at once!"

"...I wish that were me instead of you— Ahem! I mean, how outrageous...!"

What is Akira talking about? As I attempt to extract myself from Ms. Sawada's grip, Kaede comes up to us and grabs me by the arm. Akira is just standing there glaring daggers at me. S-somebody help me...

Without even listening to a word I say, Ms. Sawada begins to caress my head.

"Hush now. Just relax. This is just a teacher wanting to reward her favorite student."

"I think this very obviously lies outside of the realm of what's acceptable for normal teacher behavior!"

"Well, maybe...but I guess that's what happens when a person has been lonely and single for so long...!"

"Uhhh...I think Yuuya might be struggling there...", Rin stoically points out as Ms. Sawada and the other teachers continue to bicker.

"Huh?"

"C-can't...breathe..."

I can't think about Ms. Sawada's boobs right now; everything's

starting to go black...

After Ms. Sawada and Kaede fling me away in a panic, I can finally suck in a big breath.



"Haaah! Huff... Huff... Huff..."

"Ah-ha-ha! How was that, Yuuya? Did you get a good look at heaven?"

"I—I wasn't exactly in heaven...it was more like the grim reaper came for me."

Rin bursts out laughing.

In the end, I avoid having to give Ms. Sawada a straight answer. Somehow, I managed to survive the situation, but...Ms. Sawada was still staring at me hungrily when I left. Kaede was scowling at her like some kind of rival.

So, Akira. Don't look at me like that through those bitter tears. I don't want any of this.

"Night! I'm not staying long! I just thought I'd check in on you!"

"Woof!"

After the business with the teachers ended, I sneaked off to somewhere deserted and used magic to teleport back to my house. When it's time to head back to the camp, I'll have to be careful, but right now, it's dinnertime for Night.

Even though I've just spent all day preparing food on the field trip, I still need to make Night's meal, so I get right down to it. Luckily, I'm no longer in a survival situation, so I can make him something proper. I can even use ingredients from the other world.

As soon as it's ready, Night gobbles it right up.

"How was it? Was it to your liking?"

"Woof!"

"Good."

I like it when someone enjoys something I've made for them. I was just as happy when Kaede chowed down on the food I made for everyone earlier. I guess that's only natural, though. Everyone likes being appreciated. Not just me.

"All right, time for me to head back now, buddy. You be good!"

"Woof!" Night barks cheerfully. I give him a pat and cautiously return to the camp.

By the time I get back, it looks like it's bath time. There are some hot springs marked on the map, so we make a beeline for those. They turn out to be quite difficult to find, but a few of us eventually succeed.

"Guess we'll see each other in a little while, then."

Akira and I say goodbye to Kaede and Rin and head toward the men's bath, where quite a few other students have already gathered.

I don't feel particularly tired or anything, but I would like to have a nice relaxing soak, so we both hurry to strip our clothes off, when...

"...Hey, what are you looking at?"

For some reason, the other guys in the changing room are staring at me, shocked.

“Y-you’ll have to excuse everyone... It’s just...that your body...”

I’m not quite sure what he means yet. I’m a bit worried. The other guys nod along vigorously in agreement with Akira’s answer.

“Wh-what’s wrong with it?”

“There’s nothing wrong with it, you idiot! Although, there might be! How else could you get so ripped?! Look at you! Look at all that muscle! How can a guy like you, who doesn’t even belong to any sports teams, look like that?!”

...Because I trained so hard in the other world, I guess? Not that I can tell him that. Akira would never believe me.

I’m not just leveling up in the other world, though. I’m not sure if it’s had much of an effect, but I’ve been working out...a lot. Five hundred push-ups, sit-ups, and back extensions every single day. But I have to say, my body is completely unrecognizable from what it used to be.

“It’s breathtaking...”

“So you’re hot and you’re cool. How are we supposed to compete with that...?”

“I mean, your muscles are big, but...”

““““Down there is...!””””

“Where do you think you’re looking?!”

As soon as I notice them staring at my crotch, I hastily cover myself up with a towel. Eventually, I get away and finally enter the nice hot bath.

“Ahhh...this is so roomy!”

“The academy is pretty loaded. What else would you expect...? Wait...! Then why is that rich-ass school making us gather weeds for dinner?!”

“Ha-ha-ha...”

I force a laugh.

The hot spring is nice and big, and there’s plenty of room for all us male students to sit in it at the same time. Looking over the bath in admiration, I spot Ryou and Shingo bathing close by.

“Hey, Yuuya!”

“Th-this is the first time we’ve been able to speak to each other today.”

“Ryou! Shingo!”

“Hey! How are things going with your team?”

Ryou shoots Akira a pained smile.

“Sigh... I’ve camped a lot, but I’ve never had to forage for my own food. It’s been rough.”

“M-me and Ryou know how to cook, so making food hasn’t been a

problem. I-it's just, you know, difficult."

It looks like they haven't had the best time of it, either. Although, it hasn't been that tough for me. I have the Appraise skill, for one, and a super body thanks to all that leveling up, for another.

"By the way, I heard someone talking about you. They said you caught a fish with your bare hands or something."

"Y-yeah, I did."

"And that the food you made tasted amazing."

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha..."

I guess I did get a bit carried away. But then if I hadn't, I hate to think what dinner would've tasted like, so I don't feel too bad about it.

A contented smile makes its way onto my lips as I listen to what Ryou overheard. Akira nods dramatically in agreement.

"Ahhh...Yuuya's cooking was truly amazing... I feel like I'm in the presence of a food god..."

"R-really? That good...? You know, I thought this back in gym class that time, but...you're awesome, Yuuya! Looking at your body in front of me now, I can barely believe you aren't in any sports clubs. You've got the build of a fighter. Like someone who boxes or does karate."

"Y-you're not exactly lacking in that department, either, Ryou."

I nod in agreement to Shingo's assertion, secretly impressed by Ryou's keen eye. My body should be more suited to fighting than sports. I go around killing monsters, after all.

It's impressive that Ryou could tell. I wonder if other people can as well.

We carry on swapping stories about our day as we soak in our well-earned bath. It's already dark outside, and the stars are twinkling in the inky-black sky. It's a totally different atmosphere from the other world.

"Ahhh...this is the life..."

Ryou and the others nod in agreement with me as we sit soaking in the warm waters of the spring.

"I wonder what tomorrow will be like."

"Who knows? It'll probably be more of the same..."

"I don't wanna be bear bait again."

"Wh-what happened, Akira...?"

What might tomorrow bring... I really wanna know, but for now, we all quit talking, enjoy the soothing baths, and try to recover from the exhaustion of today.

"I can't wait to get in!"

As Yuuya and the others kicked back in the baths, Kaede and Rin also got ready to enter the hot spring. Beside Kaede, another female student stood fixated on her chest.

“Kaede!”

“Huh? Whaaa—!”

The girl suddenly reached out and grabbed Kaede’s breasts.

“Your boobs are so nice and big!!”

“H-hold on a sec!”

“How are you on the track team with a chest this huge? Are you trying to give all the boys a heart attack?”

“What?!”

“Yeah...she has a point. Your girls are lethal.”

“Not you, too, Rin...”

Rin’s eyes were locked onto Kaede’s boobs as well.

“Hmm? Is something the matter?”

“Good. Kaori and Yukine are here.”

A puzzled Kaori and Yukine approached Kaede. As they did, Kaede staggered back from Rin and attempted to hide behind Kaori for protection.

“Guys, Rin and the other girls are bullying me!”

“Wh-what?”

“...What do you mean?”

“Oh, it’s nothing! We were just chatting about how Kaede and her gigantic boobs being on the track team is probably killing half the boys at school.”

Kaori and Yukine both immediately looked at Kaede’s chest, then back to their own.

“Kaede...that’s no fair.”

“...I admit defeat.”

“Whaaat?! But I haven’t done anything!”

“Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha! You don’t have to glare at Kaede like that! You’re both so slim and beautiful in your own rights!”

“And what about you, Rin? You have the figure of a model.”

Kaede was right. Rin was tall for a girl, and her legs went on forever.

“I guess everyone is beautiful in their own way... Speaking of boobs, though, have you ever checked out Ms. Sawada? She’s huge!”

“Ms. Sawada?”

Kaori tilted her head questioningly as the topic of Ms. Sawada came up, and Kaede commented on what had happened earlier today.

“Oh! Did you hear? After Ms. Sawada tried a bit of Yuuya’s food... she asked him to marry her!”

“What? To m-marry her? I don’t understand.”

“No one’s going to understand when Kaede’s leaving out half the details. I guess it started when Yuuya made something amazing for dinner with the stuff we foraged. After that, the teachers came over to grade our meal and...I guess Ms. Sawada loved it so much that she

just up and proposed to Yuuya.”

“I still don’t understand where marriage fits into this chain of events exactly...”

“...I saw Yuuya’s food up close. It looked amazing. I wanted to try some, too.”

“You too, huh, Yukine...? Still, this whole teacher proposing to a student business... Where do you even start?”

“Ha-ha-ha! True. But Ms. Sawada’s breasts are on par with Kaede’s. Any guy getting propositioned by those things probably feels like all his Christmases have come at once.”

“B-but...”

Kaori seemed disheartened by what Kaede was saying. Meanwhile, Kaede was burning with competitive spirit.

“I—I say bring it on. If Ms. Sawada is throwing her hat in the ring, then I—!”

“Huh? Kaede...does that mean you also...?”

“What? Aaah! No! I didn’t mean Yuuya specifically...”

Rin coolly stared down a flustered and beet-red Kaede.

“...You’re as easy to read as always.”

“...How come she gets to have such big boobs?”

“Are you still hung up on that?”

In front of Kaede’s resolve, Kaori looked sadly back down at her own breasts and muttered to herself, “Does Yuuya...prefer girls with bigger chests...?”

Between this and that, the atmosphere was already lively before any of the girls even got in the baths. Once in, the girls let the hot springs work their magic.

“This feels so good...!”

“It does.”

“I was so excited for camp! I can’t believe the teachers turned it into a survival situation.”

“I know... And I think we have to do the same again tomorrow.”

“Ugh...really...?”

As Kaede scoffed at Rin’s words, another girl nearby chimed in to the conversation.

“What are you talking about, Kaede? You should be happy! You and Rin are on that guy Tenjou’s team, aren’t you?”

“Exactly! That guy is so hot! He’s all anyone can talk about at school lately.”

“Plus, I saw him in *CutieBeauty* with that up-and-coming model Miul!”

As soon as the topic turned to Yuuya, the conversation heated up again.

“I heard what he did today as well! Something about amazing food

and catching the fish for it bare-handed.”

“Yeah, I can’t tell you how incredible it tasted!!”

“You’re so lucky!”

The surrounding girls sounded super jealous as Kaede blissfully regaled them with her experience of Yuuya’s cooking.

“Ahhh... It’s bad enough that you get to be on the same team as Yuuya, but getting to eat the food he’s made as well...”

“When you’re so close to someone so amazing, it makes you feel like you’re in a manga, doesn’t it?”

“I totally get it!”

The girls continued to talk enthusiastically, but the conversation took a different direction than that of the boys’. They gossiped about school, who’s hot in their classes, and what would happen the next day, as they relaxed in the hot spring’s warm embrace.

Most teams in the same class have pitched their tents near one another, and the next morning, many of the other students are now up and awake. Ryou and the others are among them.

“Ugh, I hate this... This is absolutely not what I had in mind when I was told we were going to camp... And now they go and tell us we have to forage again...!”

“Just leave it, Akira. No matter how much we complain, food isn’t just going to magically appear in our bellies.”

“I know; I just don’t wanna accept it!”

“It’s okay. We just have to get through today.”

A peaceful atmosphere descends on the camp as everyone starts talking about their expectations for the day ahead, when—

“BEAAARRR!”

“Wha—?!”

“A-a bear?!”

A student comes running into view, screaming his head off. Behind him bounds a bear at full speed.

“A-a bear?! That’s the one that tried to eat me yesterday!”

“Seriously?! Hey, Akira? How do you feel about being bear bait again? You could bring it down for us!”

“No way! Even I’m not capable of being prince of bear slaying!”

“You don’t have to kill it to be good bait!”

“Y-you’re all conspiring against meee!!”

Akira was sluggish at first this morning, but seeing a bear has certainly lit a fire under him.

It looks as if a student went to raise the alarm among the teachers, because Ms. Sawada is soon running over.

“Heeey! Is everyone all right?!”

“Listen up! Evacuate right behind your teachers! When you’re on the

move, make sure to keep as many obstacles as possible between yourselves and the bear!”

Luckily, there are no students near the bear, so that part of the plan goes smoothly. However, the bear is soon in pursuit.

“And unsurprisingly, none of us teachers know how to use a shotgun!”

“Eek...! Wh-why don’t we use drugs...?”

“Ms. Yomikawa, don’t you think if we tried that, we’d die anyway?!”

“Why is there a bear here in the first place? This land is carefully managed!”

“I bet it tore down a nearby fence or something. We’ll have to investigate later...”

“In any case, the only thing we can do until the police get here is try to survive!”

As the teachers discuss a plan of action among themselves, Ms. Sawada is distracted by her students and stumbles.

“Argh!”

“Ms. Sawada!”

It’s extremely dangerous to leave yourself open to a bear. That’s why the other teachers waste no time in trying to save her, but the bear is already closing in.

“Raaargh!”

“...It looks like this is the end for me,” Ms. Sawada utters hopelessly. Looking more closely, I can see cold sweat beading and dripping from her forehead. She tries to back away slowly, but the bear refuses to let her out of its sights.

“Graaaaah!”

“W-watch out!”

The bear is riled up and swings its thick, heavy arms into the air. The moment it begins to bring them back down—

—I’m running forward.

“Yuuya?!”

Kaede screams my name in shock nearby. But I’m already standing between Ms. Sawada and the bear.

As its arms come crashing down, I take the blow...and stop it in its tracks with just one hand.

“G-grah?!”

“T-Tenjou?!”

It’s not just the bear that’s surprised. Ms. Sawada’s eyes are wide in complete shock.

Oh, crap...what excuse do I have this time? I think I’ve gone too far to be able to say that I just have good athletic instincts. But I couldn’t just stand there and watch someone get attacked without doing

something. I don't know what's going to happen after this, but that's a problem for future me!

If it's between battling monsters in the other world and battling animals here, I'll take the animals any day. They're much easier to deal with. I mean, in the other world, I fought to the death with a Devil Bear. Those things spit fire...

"Gr-graaaagh!"

As the bear panics, its giant arm still stopped by my one hand, it swings its other arm up, this time aiming for me on the way down.

I stop this blow with my other free hand, forming a sort of grappling stance with the bear.

"H-he's wrestling with it?!"

"What's happening?"

"Can a person really take on a bear in a fistfight and win?"

Everyone is staring in shock, unable to believe their eyes. I need to get this over with as quickly as possible, so I throw up the bear's arms to get out of the grapple and wrap my arms around the animal's trunk.



“Graaaagh?!”

“Who does he think is? Some kind of sumo wrestler?”

“Never mind that... How the hell is he going toe-to-toe with a bear?!”

As Ryou and Kaede provide a running commentary on the scene unfolding before them, I lift the bear into the air.

“Hup!”

“Graaaaah!”

“Oh my god! He’s picking up a bear!!”

“Unnngh!”

I throw the bear as hard as I can into the distance. It goes flying, eventually crashing to the ground, where its eyes roll back into its head, and it crumples into a heap.

I lightly dust off my hands and call out to the unconscious bear.

“Whew... Maybe now you’ve learned a valuable lesson about needlessly attacking other living things.”

“““Wait, wait, wait! This is too weird!””” I hear the people around me saying among themselves.

“T-Tenjou! Are you all right?!”

“Oh, Ms. Sawada. I’m totally fine. I’m more worried about you.”

“Huh? Oh, ah...your teacher is just dandy, but...you’re obviously not totally fine. Go and see Ms. Yomikawa right away!”

“Wha—?! But I’m okay, honestly...”

“Just do it.”

At the behest of the uncharacteristically stern-faced Ms. Sawada, I reluctantly trudge over to Ms. Yomikawa for a checkup.

After the school nurse issues me a clean bill of health, Ms. Sawada approaches me once again to reiterate her gratitude.

“Thank you for what you did earlier, Tenjou. In all honesty, I should be reprimanding you as your teacher for doing something so freaking dangerous...but that would be a bit hypocritical of me considering you saved my life, wouldn’t it? Perhaps I could give you a reward instead?”

“I-I’ll take a rain check on that...”

“Well...I’ll be here waiting.”

She might be waiting a long time...

Now that the situation is more or less under control, I thought that would be the end of it, but...the biggest problem still remains.

And that is...

“Grah...”

“What should we do about the bear?”

The bear has become completely docile.

At this rate, it’ll probably be put down. If it’s lucky, it’ll get to live in

a zoo. As I reflect on the bear's likely fate, Kaori approaches.

"Don't worry about the bear...since it's already here, we've decided to keep it in the grounds."

"Huh?! You're going to keep it here?!"

Kaori cracks a smile after I repeat her words back to her in surprise.

"Yes. We've already obtained permission from the town, so there are no obstacles to clear in doing so. We're going to train it to protect the grounds. Like a patrol dog. Or in this case, a patrol bear."

"A patrol bear..."

That sounds fearsome.

"You managed to get that permission sorted quickly, huh?"

"Well...that...may have been down to my father's influence..."

The principal is one powerful man.

The bear is looking misty-eyed at Kaori as though it can understand every single word she is saying.

"Um...are you sure you know what you're doing? I know no one got hurt in the end, but keeping a bear sounds pretty dangerous..."

"I'm sure it will be fine! Besides, if the bear attacks anyone else, we'll just cook it into a nice stew."

"Gr-grah?! ...*Kuma...kuma, kuma...*"

"Hey, you were making horrible growling sounds until just a second ago. Why are you trying to play the innocent now? Honestly, '*kuma*' is a weird choice as far as suck-up noises go as well!"

I'm still worried about a few things, but it's been decided that the bear will live here (hopefully) in peace. And with that, a very eventful field trip comes to a close.

Epilogue

“...That was fun...,” I—the Headhunter—murmur quietly, still on the trail of my mark in the Weald.

But all good things must come to an end. It looks like there won’t be many chances to come back here again.

While I still haven’t managed to get my hands on the person who saved Princess Lexia’s life, a new lead has come to light. Something about an invitation to the royal palace.

And the date of this summons is finally upon us. It’s tomorrow.

As an added bonus, it sounds like Princes Lexia and her royal escort will be journeying personally to the edge of the Weald to link up with her mysterious hero.

It will be the perfect opportunity to annihilate them both, just as instructed by the nobleman client who ordered the hit.

“...I wonder how *he’s* doing?”

The image of another guy surfaces in my mind.

During my initial investigation, I had been set upon by a band of Goblin Elites, only to be saved by that guy from certain death. His name—Yuuya.

He’s a mysterious person with an exotic air about him. And he’s followed everywhere by a little black dog called Night.

“Hee-hee...”

It always brings a smile to my face. Whenever I think of that lie I had to make up on the spur of the moment...about how I’d come to the Weald to train.

If I was really going to train, I wouldn’t go to a place like that. It’s so dangerous that it’s not even worth it. And it’s totally unfit for training anyway. Most of the monsters there attack in hordes, and beasts like the Goblin Elites are hard enough to deal with on their own as it is. It’s clear as day that you would die before you managed to improve anything.

That's why when I told him that ridiculous lie, I wished I could have kept my mouth shut. But once it was out there, I had no choice but to continue to play along.

He must have suspected something...or so I thought.

"Hmm? Oh, um...you see...uhhh...I was training, too! I came to this forest specifically to train!"

Honestly...I never thought I'd see the day when I'd meet someone who specifically chose the Weald for their training...

Maybe that's why I was thrown off enough to spout that stupid lie. Yet Yuuya never said anything, so maybe he did fall for it.

Even though I'm the one who should have been under suspicion, I was doubtful of his supposed purpose for coming to the Weald instead. But then, after our negotiation when we agreed to train in the Weald together, I could see that he was telling me the truth.

I witnessed him exterminate entire bands of Goblin Elites single-handedly, or together with a little help from Night. To be honest, I should have realized how strong he was earlier. He would have had to be tough to save me from the monsters that knocked me out.

In any case, once I was sure he really was there for training, I was able to gradually build a solid friendship with him.

He's a strange one. He's handsome, in possession of some of the finest equipment I've ever seen, and he even acts like a royal or a nobleman. Yet he seems to have a very selective base of knowledge.

When it comes to how to act and what to say, he knows what to do, yet he knew nothing about the forest in which he chose to train. It's like he knows almost nothing about this world at all.

But that wasn't a problem for me.

It was never anything but a trivial concern whenever I placed my life in Yuuya's hands.

...I might have been in the Weald on a job, but I truly had fun with him and his pup.

And what was even more unexpected was how much I enjoyed those portable baths of his. When I found out that Yuuya carried around portable baths, it was as surprising as when I realized his true battle strength.

...And someone like me, a girl who used to have to wash off the blood of her victims in the river, was finally able to know what it felt like to actually enjoy the warmth of a real bath.

I ended up a prisoner to the magic of those baths that were warm enough to melt my frozen assassin's heart.

Of course, it wasn't just the baths that won me over.

Before I knew it, I was able to take on three Goblin Elites at a time. I became really strong. I hope I can train alongside him again one day, but then...I remember my job.

I've killed a lot of people.

That's how I know Yuuya is pure. He's probably never killed anything that isn't a monster. Compared to him, I've taken the lives of so many.

I was born an orphan. The strength I desperately accumulated to defend myself...is what has kept me alive all these years. Being a woman meant I wound up in danger time and time again, but somehow, I survived. By the time I had become powerful enough so that no one could ever take anything away from me...I was already feared as the Headhunter.

This is the only world in which I know how to live. Concealing the fact that I'm a woman as I use my power to assassinate others. I... don't know how to do anything else.

My hands are dirty, stained with the blood of countless victims.

I have no place next to someone as purehearted as Yuuya.

I can't sully his hands as well.

"Still...he shined so brightly to me."

I feel it so deeply that I can't help but allow the emotions I felt back then to manifest on my face.

For someone like me who has to deny their emotions just to survive...he sparkled. He shined so bright that for one glorious second, I believed that maybe one day I could bathe in that light alongside him.

"But...that, too, ends today."

When Yuuya told me he was going to stop training with me, I felt lonely. I felt sad.

Yet I also somehow felt that the end was drawing near.

Because I had already heard that Princess Lexia and her soldiers would soon be on their way to the Weald. I'd heard the rumors in town even before I was officially tasked with this job. There was no way someone in the Guild of Darkness such as myself wouldn't have known.

That job is the reason why I can no longer stay with Yuuya.

"...I wonder what Yuuya would think if he knew the real me?"

I'm afraid of what his answer would be, yet I'm still curious.

But now I'll never know.

"..."

I silently reach for my mask and fix it onto my face.

I'm a killer.

The Headhunter of the Guild of Darkness.

That's why...

"...I must say goodbye, Yuuya."

Slipping into the shadows, I leave the city and make my way toward the Weald.

I empty my mind as I run, shaking away any lingering thoughts of Yuuya. Even so...I'll treasure the time I spent with him forever.

I've killed to survive.

I mustn't have any feelings about whether I want to kill or not. That's one of the few ways I can respect the people I've had to kill in order to live.

...Yet I can't help but think.

"If...if you and I had met under different circumstances..."

If my life weren't stained with the blood of others. If I were just a normal girl...

"...I wonder if I could have ever stood proudly by your side, Yuuya."

My question simply melts away into the darkness.

"All right, Night! Are you ready?"

"Woof!"

Finally back from the field trip safe and sound, I'm about to lead Night toward the entrance to the Weald as I had promised Lexia and the others.

It's actually Golden Week back on Earth, so I managed to secure some time for my visit... Plus, I got a few extra days off to reflect on the field trip, so I've got time to spare. I don't think I'll need to spend every day of it in this world, but it'll be nice to have a buffer between going home and when class starts again. And if things get a bit tight, then I've always got my teleportation magic.

I still hadn't met Night last time I saw Lexia and her soldiers, but now he's an established member of my family. If they allow it, then I'd definitely like him to tag along. If not, then I can perhaps magic him somewhere...but I hope they let me bring him.

In any case, the only thing I can do is ask.

"All right, this is it!"

I've packed everything I'll need into my Item Box, so clad in my Bloodstained Ogre Armor, I head out the door.

Usually, I head in the opposite direction, farther toward the depths of the forest, but today I'm on my way toward the outskirts of the Weald. It's where Luna and I did our combination of monster hunting and training, so I wonder if there's been a decrease in the number of monsters active lately?

To be fair, though, while I was on the field trip, I didn't get the chance to go back there again, so I shouldn't expect too much.

"Now that I think about her, I wonder how Luna's doing?"

"...Woof." Night barks with an expression I can't quite read.

After a bit more walking, I suddenly sense a monster.

"Uh-oh... Looks like the numbers didn't go down very much after

all.”

“Woof.”

I immediately activate my One with Nature skill and creep closer to where I sense the beast...

There stands a monster I’ve never seen before. It’s surrounded by numerous Bloody Ogres, but it’s much larger. It’s covered in a dark red coloring and is much more sinister-looking than the rest of them.

I hold my breath and activate my Appraise skill.

Bloody Ogre Lord

Level: 500, **Mana:** 4000, **Attack:** 25000, **Defense:** 10000,
Agility: 10000, **Intelligence:** 3000, **Luck:** 1000

Huh?! No way... Don’t tell me this is the same class as the King Orc! Its attack and agility stats are even higher!

The Bloody Ogre Lord is unmistakably a higher order of the Bloody Ogres.

What should we do...? I know I’m expected to meet up with the princess, but I have to get rid of this monster...

“...All right, Night. Let’s beat these guys here and now. It’ll be dangerous if they find their way toward Lexia and the others.”

“Woof.”

Luckily, we never agreed on a specific time, and I left my place with plenty to spare, so I should still make it.

“Okay... When I give the signal, you take care of all the smaller Bloody Ogres.”

“Woof!”

“Ready...set...GO!”

“Awoooo!”

“Grah?!”

Once I give the signal, Night leaps into action with a war cry.

The Bloody Ogres are momentarily stunned by the surprise attack, and many become prey for Night to sink his claws into.

But the Bloody Ogre Lord is different. It’s immediately aware of Night.

—Unluckily for it, Night’s not the only one it should be worrying about.

“Now—!”

I’ve been concealing my presence with my One with Nature skill, and now that Night has distracted the Bloody Ogre Lord, it’s time to throw my Absolute Spear with all my might.

Not even the King Orc was able to dodge this, so I doubt the Bloody Ogre Lord will—?!

“Graaaaagh!!”

“What the—?”

Somehow, the Bloody Ogre Lord has caught the tip of my Absolute Spear between its hands and stopped it in its tracks!

And now it’s gripping my spear by the handle and throwing it my way!

“Argh...!”

As I dive for cover, the Absolute Spear flies by at extreme speed.

Luckily, I’m the only one who knows how to wield it properly. If it isn’t guaranteed to hit me, then it isn’t guaranteed to return to the Bloody Ogre Lord, either. This time, the spear returns to me.

Whew...I never thought in a million years that I’d have the sage’s weapons turned against me... That made me panic a bit. If it weren’t for the fact that I’m the only one who can control the Absolute Spear, I would have been done for.

I quickly replace the Absolute Spear in my Item Box and take out a different weapon.

And that is...

“Then how about this?!”

“Gra-graaaaaagh?!”

I’m brandishing an enormous hammer that’s even taller than I am. Without a second’s hesitation, I take aim at the Bloody Ogre Lord and swing.

The monster puts out its two enormous arms to try and stop the blow again, but the hammer easily smashes through, blowing the monster to smithereens right where it stands.

Worldsmasher.

An enormous hammer weapon left behind by the sage that looks to be even bigger than I am, so over one hundred and eighty centimeters.

This goes for all the weapons the sage left me, but the hammer isn’t particularly ornate. It just looks like a giant hammer. Still darn effective, though.

From what I can tell, the hammer seems to weigh the same as an adult man...but if you’re hit by it, it’s like getting hit in the face by the mass of the Earth. There isn’t a person alive who could endure such massive damage. Damn, that sage made some crazy-ass weapons...!

But there is a downside to the Worldsmasher. As I mentioned, it weighs as much as an adult man...but with my current stats, it’s hard to really call that heavy.

However, the weight of the hammer doesn’t respect stats, so it still *feels* like lifting a full-grown man even when I wield it.

I also have to be careful not to hit any allies while I’m swinging it around, so it’s not suited to long-range attacks, and I have to try not to cause any damage to my surroundings. Because any damage I do

would be catastrophic.

Still, when all is said and done, it's still great for smashing a single opponent with the force of a planet. One blow on target and the battle is over.

Although if I'm facing an enemy with a decent agility stat and I'm brandishing a weapon that weighs as much as a person, it probably won't always hit.

In the Weald, instead of waiting for a fatal opening and swinging hard, always go for the weapons with the superior ability to one-shot kill.

“You have gained a level.”

The level up message suddenly appears in front of me.

“Oh, that's a good sign!”

“—Woof!”

“Hmm? Oh, Night? Are you done, too, buddy?”

“Woof! Woof!”

By the time my battle is over, Night has picked off the rest of the Bloody Ogres one by one, and the entire area is littered with drop items.

First, I gather up the spoils from the Bloody Ogres, then from the Bloody Ogre Lord. As I search the area where the Bloody Ogre Lord fell, I find the same fangs and magic stones dropped by the normal Bloody Ogres. But there's something else...an armored helm.

Great Fang of the Lord of the Bloodstained Ogres—Fang of a Bloody Ogre Lord. A tough fang befitting a Bloody Ogre Lord, the higher order of the Bloody Ogres. While the fangs are generally not used in attacks, their power is even more brutal than those of the Bloody Ogres.

Magic Stone: S—Rank S. A special ore that can be obtained from monsters with mana.

Armored Helm of the Lord of the Bloodstained Ogres—A drop item from a Bloody Ogre Lord. The helm is designed to mimic the appearance of a Bloody Ogre Lord and has a chance to intimidate a chosen target. This chance increases the larger the gap in power between the wearer and the opponent.

Wow...setting aside the magic stone, the fang and the helm sound pretty good. The only problem is that I don't have a use for the fang right now.

The Armored Helm of the Lord of the Bloodstained Ogres matches my Bloodstained Ogre Armor and covers my entire face. Apart from

the fact that two demon-like horns protrude from the mask, it's quite difficult to describe... I guess it's not dissimilar to the masked helmets you see in *tokusatsu* superhero shows. The color and shape make me look like a bad guy, though.

Hmm...I don't really get the intimidate effect, but I don't have anything to lose just by trying it on.

I place it on my head and turn to Night.

"So? How do I look?"

"Woof!"

I'll take that to mean "Good." That said, it covers my entire face, so I guess it would be pretty difficult to actually make it look bad.

"All right! Shall we get back on the road?"

"Woof!"

We encounter a few more battles on the way, but nothing like the fight with the Bloody Ogre Lord, and eventually reach the edge of the forest.

"Well, we made it, but..."

I scan the area around the edge of the forest, but there's no sign of Lexia or the others.

"Hmm...maybe we're early, Night?"

"Woof..."

"Hmm? Night?"

I call out Night's name, but for some reason, he's hiding his presence and gives me nothing more than a quick nod in return.

Maybe he's on alert because I'm being so careless right now. I need to buck up.

Once I mentally admonish myself, I catch sight of something up ahead. Something emerging from the trees in the distance.

"Huh? What is that...?"

As I squint to get a better look, I can make out a beautiful carriage surrounded by numerous soldiers.

"Wow, this is the first time I've ever seen a carriage in person! I hope the lack of road isn't causing them any trouble!"

I know there are some places back on Earth where you can ride in a horse-drawn carriage, but I've never seen one, so it really is quite a surprising sight for me. The only thing is, it's all grass around here. There's no asphalt or gravel or sand, like back home, so I wonder how the wheels are doing. I would have expected them to have broken by now.

The carriage continues to approach and then draws to a stop. A figure descends from the carriage and turns toward me, flanked on all sides by guards.

As soon as I see their faces, I recognize them as the soldiers charged

with the protection of Princess Lexia, and on further inspection, I can now make out Her Highness and Owen in their midst.

As they draw closer and closer, I suddenly realize something.

...Wait? I'm waiting here, standing straight, but...aren't I the one who's supposed to approach them?

Oh god! I'm totally screwing this up...!!

I'm still freaking out when Lexia and the others draw level with me.

Aaargh, why am I so damn bad at this kind of stuff?! I'm going to see the king! What if I offend the crown...?!

As I wait nervously, Owen looks at me and raises his hand before seeming to realize something and stopping.

I—I wonder what's the matter...

The muscles in Owen's face tense up, and all becomes clear.

"L-Lord Yuuya...?"

"Huh? Oh! Sorry! Yes, it's me!"

Owen's face immediately relaxes in relief, and behind him, Lexia's eyes light up.

"Sir Yuuya! That helmet is wonderful! It truly suits you!"

"Y-you think so? Thank you."

"Yes...she's right. If memory serves, you didn't have this helm when we last met, correct, Lord Yuuya?"

"This? Oh, I acquired it from a Bloody Ogre Lord we met on the road here! It matches my armor, so I just had to have it."

The murmurs from the soldiers listening in start almost immediately.

"Uh...did he just say he took it from a Bloody Ogre Lord...?"

"Didn't one of those things wipe out a small kingdom a while back...?"

"Yeah, if you ever spot one near your kingdom, it takes everything your country has just to put it down."

"...Yet he still stands...speaking as if he was just going about his day...?"

"It's like he's living in a completely different world than the rest of us..."

"Uhhh...?"

It's hard to make out what they're saying. Did I say something strange...?

What if the helm doesn't suit me after all?! In that case, I wish someone would just come out and say it...

"I see. Well...Lord Yuuya. We've come to escort you to the royal palace... I presume there won't be any problems with that?"

"Oh, no! I'm ready when you are."



“Understood... Men!”

At Owen’s command, all the soldiers—including him—salute me. It’s an overwhelming sight to behold. At the center of them all, even Princess Lexia offers me a graceful, ladylike bow.

“We would like to thank you for accepting our invitation and hope you have a pleasant journey with us to the capital.”

“Th-thank you...”

All this attention is making me a little uncomfortable. I’m not sure what to do about it...

Unaware of my internal fretting, Owen and Lexia turn to escort me toward the carriage.

“Please come right this way...”

“Okay... Ah! S-sorry, but can you just hold on a moment?!”

“Oh?”

Having been swept along by all the royal pomp, I’ve forgotten to mention Night!

“Um, there’s someone else I would like to—”

“Grrrrr...WOOF!”

“Argh?!”

“Princess Lexia?!”

“Night?!”

The second I begin to introduce Night to Owen and Lexia, the pup dives for the princess!

As I rush over to her, something shoots through the spot where she was just standing.

Following the object with my eyes, I see it *whoosh* into and fell a nearby tree.

If Night hadn’t knocked her to the ground, something would have shot straight through her.

“Wh-what’s with this dog?!”

“Are you all right, Your Highness?!”

“Y-yes. I’m fine, but...”

Lexia is completely stunned. Now on alert, I scan the surrounding area with Night.

“Night...is this why you were concealing your presence? Did you know something was up?”

“Woof.”

“...I have so many questions, but now’s not the time. We have to find the assailant...!”

“WOOF!”

At that very moment, I sense the invisible weapon that had been used to attack Lexia coming right for us. I draw the Omnisword, slashing the weapon away.

I feel some kind of tension give way. It feels like...thread...?

Luna's face flashes in the back of my mind, but I shake my head and perish the thought.

No...there's no way...

"Lord Yuuya! What is going on here?!"

"I haven't got the faintest idea why, but Lexia is the target! The animal that pushed her over earlier is my dog, Night, who I was about to introduce you to...!"

"What?! So that pup is an ally?!"

"Yes! I'll explain later, but for now, protect your princess!"

"...Yes, sir!"

Now I can worry less about Lexia and turn my attention to the attacker.

Then...

"...Night, can you tell where the person is who attacked us?"

"...Woof."

Night returns a short bark and runs off toward the entrance to the forest.

I immediately follow and activate my One with Nature skill. Although I don't know if it's going to work.

As soon as we enter the Weald, there the culprit is.

"...Where did they go...?"

The figure is clad in a dark green robe and doesn't appear to be able to locate us as they restlessly scan the surrounding forest.

Their face is also concealed by a mask, so I can't tell what kind of expression they're making.

"Woof!"

"Huh?! Argh—!"

Approaching them from behind, I release the power I've been saving up and send the figure flying. The assailant, dressed all in black under the robe, flies straight into a tree, crumpling into a heap among the roots below.

Enraged, I walk up to the figure and find their mask lying on the ground beside them.

My eyes travel to the figure's face.

"...Luna... Why...?"

Lying unconscious at the base of the tree is none other than my training partner, Luna.

As I stare at Luna's limp form in shock, I sense someone else enter the Weald.

"Sir Yuuya!"

"Princess Lexia?!"

Looking up, I see Princess Lexia running toward me. Owen and his men are in hot pursuit behind her, so I guess she gave him the slip to come and find me.

When she reaches me, she glances down at the sight of a knocked-out Luna and gasps.

“Huh?! So she...?”

“...She’s the one who was after you, Your Highness.”

At first, I’m unsure what to say, but in the end, I opt for the truth.

Covering for Luna isn’t going to help anyone now.

Somehow perceiving my internal dilemma, Lexia gives me a worried look.

“Sir Yuuya? Is this girl...a friend of yours?”

“...Yes.”

But why...? Still, no matter how many questions I have, Luna isn’t in any shape to answer them right now.

Yet the more I think about the situation, the weirder it becomes.

Why had a girl with no weapon and no armor been lurking all alone in a forest so dangerous it can terrify a fully armed knight of the realm like Owen? And what about the way Night was acting before she revealed herself?

I wonder if Night subconsciously knew that it was Luna, and that’s why he didn’t react when we found her after her attack on Lexia.

I look down at Night, who looks back at me with a sorry look on his face.

He probably thinks we could have avoided all this if he had just done more to stop me the day I’d saved her. If he had, then I would never have met her and would have been spared these feelings I have today. He always tries to have my back.

I flash a strained smile at Night and gently pat him.

Then I walk over to Luna and pick her up in my arms.

“...Princess Lexia. I’m very sorry, but could you wait a little while?”

“Oh?”

“I want to take this girl back to my house and give her medical attention.”

“Okay...”

“With your permission, I’d just like the opportunity to speak to her one last time. I don’t believe this girl to be a bad person...”

I know what I’m asking for is something ridiculous that will never be granted. I’m asking them to let me take time to look after someone who just made an attempt on Lexia’s life. On *Princess* Lexia’s life. And I’m not solely asking to speak with her, I’m asking to take care of—

“Fine.”

“Are you sure?!”

I can’t believe how casually Lexia agreed. How can she just decide like that?

Taking no notice of my bewilderment, Lexia laughs to herself mischievously and calls out to Owen, who is still a little distance

away.

“Owen! I’m just off to Yuuya’s place for a little while!”

“Huh?!”

“““H-huuuh?!”””

“Princess Lexia! What are you saying?!”

We all shout in surprise. Owen is white as a sheet.

I’m also standing there stunned, when I feel a tap on my shoulder.

“Come on, let’s hurry! You don’t want Owen to catch us, do you?”

“Wha...?”

I’m still incapable of grasping what is happening right now, but Lexia is already leaving me behind and making her way farther into the Weald.

Sensing that she really is serious about this, I dash after her. Lexia turns to me as she keeps on walking.

“I’m also interested in what your relationship is with this girl, and... if you really don’t know why she would attack me, I think we should speak to her together. I want to know why she targeted me, too.”

“A-are you really sure about this? When I say she’s not a bad person, it’s just a gut feeling...”

That’s right. I just can’t see Luna as a bad person. If she was, Night would have taken her down without even waiting for my order...

“Gut feeling or not, I still want to hear what she has to say! Now, are we going to run away from Owen or not?”

Lexia runs playfully away with me on her tail. Behind us, Owen is closing in with amazing speed.

“Princess Lexia! Wait! Do you really mean to go back with them?! Tell me!! What is the meaning of thiiiis?!”

Chased by the echoes of Owen’s desperate yells behind us, I’m on my knees begging for his forgiveness in my head. I’m so sorry about this, Owen! But I have my reasons, too...!

As we continue to run, I grab Lexia’s hand.

“Huh? Sir Yuuya?”

“There’s no time. I’m going to magic us home.”

“Magic...?!”

I activate my teleportation magic and transport myself, Lexia, Luna, and Night back to my house in a flash.

“Was that...really magic?!”

When we reach my place, Lexia stands there in shock, unsure of what just happened.

Keeping an eye on her, I lay Luna down on the bed. Once I’ve got her in a comfortable position, Lexia approaches me.

“...Sir Yuuya. You will tell me everything now, won’t you?”

“...I will. This girl—Luna—is someone I ran into one day in the

Weald.”

“Ran into?”

“...Maybe *ran into* isn’t the right phrase. Considering what happened today, I’m not sure how coincidental it really was anymore. In any case, I saved her from a band of Goblin Elites on the outskirts of the Weald, and we ended up becoming training buddies.”

I knew she was a little mysterious from the get-go, but knowing what I do now, I wouldn’t be surprised if she came to the Weald to scope things out when she discovered that Lexia was going to arrive here today.

I tell Lexia all about the training we did together and explain our relationship in detail.

That’s when...

“Awww... No fair!”

“Huh?!”



"It sounds like she got to spend a lot of time training together with you, but *I* want to spend time with you, too!!"

"R-right..."

I don't know how I'm supposed to react to that...

Despite my obvious confusion, Lexia's face grows stern.

"What do you plan to do with her now?"

"Exactly what I said I would earlier... I'm going to treat her injuries, and then when she wakes up...I'm going to ask her to explain herself."

"But...you're supposed to accompany us to the royal palace today..."

"I know...and I'm sorry. I can still escort you back to Owen and the others, though."

I know I promised Lexia that I would go with them today, but I can't leave Luna in this state.

I'm starting to feel bad about how I might have disappointed her, when Lexia leaps to her feet.

"I've decided! I'm going to stay here and look after this girl with you!"

"...What?!"

It takes me a moment to process what she's saying. Lexia looks at me with expectant eyes.

"Even if *you* can't come to the royal palace so that you can treat this girl, *I* can still stay here with you!"

"But...you're a princess...and—"

"All the more reason for me to stay, then, don't you think? I can't leave an assassin who tried to kill a princess here for treatment without proper supervision. So I'll stay here to help look after her and to keep an eye on her!"

All I can do is stare at a determined Lexia with a dumb look on my face.

"It'll be just like playing house!"

Lexia shoots me one final mischievous grin.

While Yuuya was in the other world getting caught up in the strange business surrounding Luna, news of Yuuya was once again setting the celebrity world on fire.

"Hmm... So he's got himself a little black dog now, has he...?" The female owner of Miu's agency murmured to herself quietly in her chair. "...This boy is becoming more and more newsworthy by the day. And according to Miu, his little four-legged friend is quite delightful... Either way, we could use this to broaden the fan base."

The president narrowed her eyes, like a carnivore stalking its prey.

"I won't let you slip through my fingers, Yuuya Tenjou..."

—And just like that, Yuuya was unknowingly getting ever more

entangled in yet another sticky situation back on Earth.

Afterword

Long time no see! Miku here!

I would very much like to thank you for picking up one of my books again.

Over the last two volumes, Yuuya has been preparing to leave the forest of his new world and step foot in somewhere new. I feel like I'm doing the same as I move to Tokyo this April to start a new life there.

In these past four years as a university student in Osaka, I can't say I've left my house very much, except to go to class and hang out with my friends, so I feel like I never really got to know the city.

That's why when one of my friends from my hometown came to visit during my university's festival, I also took the opportunity to finally do a bit of sightseeing. In the four years I'd lived there, it was the first time I ever saw the famous Glico billboard.

And now I'm off to chase my dreams in Tokyo...and anticipate much of the same.

But I will make the most of it.

Just as Yuuya has been invited to the new and exciting world of the capital city in this story, I hope I'm just as successful in making new friends as I begin my life in Japan's biggest city.

There are also a few people whom I would like to thank:

My editor, who is always helping me to come up with ideas to improve the story.

Rein Kuwashima, who breathes an extra level of charm into my story with cool and cute illustrations.

And every single person who chose to read my story from among countless others at *Kakuyomu*.

I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I'm looking forward to seeing you all again in Volume 3!

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